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# Female Primary Characters in Several of Blasco's Valencian Novels.

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FEMALE PRIMARY CHARACTERS IN SEVERAL OF BLASCO'S  
VALENCIAN NOVELS

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FEMALE PRIMARY CHARACTERS  
IN SEVERAL OF BLASCO'S  
VALENCIAN NOVELS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Foreign Languages

by  
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## ABSTRACT

The objective of this thesis is to prove, contrary to general belief, that a considerable number of Blasco Ibañez's female characters are indeed protagonists. We focus our study on Blasco's masterpieces, his Valencian novels, and we limit our discussion to seven specific women characters in four of these works: Dolores, Rosario, Tía Tona, and Tía Picores of Flor de Mayo; doña Manuela of Arroz y tartana; doña Bernarda of Entre naranjos; and Neleta of Cañas y barro. These seven characters were chosen because they are protagonists, and because they represent most clearly the feminine characters found in his Valencian period.

We examine not only the characterizations of these women, but also Blasco's personal experiences, including his relationships with his mother and his wives, which may have influenced his characters' development. Furthermore the historical setting, particularly the subservient position of the nineteenth-century Spanish woman, is also considered.

In order to facilitate our analysis, we have divided the feminine characters into two sections:

- (1) "Crude, Masculine Fisherwomen" (Dolores, Rosario, Tía Tona, and Tía Picores)
- (2) "Domineering, Materialistic Widows" (doña Manuela, dona Bernarda, and Neleta)

This division allows us to study in detail each female protagonist as an individual and as part of a comparative group. The common elements of their physical descriptions and their personalities as well as the various stylistic techniques employed by the author are discussed. We also pay particular attention to the principal roles of the women, namely as wives, mothers, lovers, and friends.

The conclusion of our thesis concentrates primarily on the qualities shared by all of the seven female characters studied, specifically the similarities in their physical appearances, their characterizations, and their relationships to the underlying themes in the novels, in particular, death, love, and greed. In addition to the four Valencian novels discussed, we also refer to Blasco's later work, Los enemigos de la mujer (1919). Several of the passages in this novel help to explain the author's ideas about women in general, and for the most part substantiate our own opinions about his female characters.

In our final observations we comment that even in his later works, Blasco depicts a great number of his feminine heroines as protagonists. This fact further strengthens our contention held throughout the thesis, that certain female characters in Blasco's Valencian novels are primary and important.



## INTRODUCTION

Although there have been powerful and illustrious women in the history of Spain, for the most part the woman's position in society has been a lowly one. Such position has been expressed throughout Spanish literature, particularly by novelists, who have emphasized in their female characters inferiority and total dependence. This generally submissive condition has limited women to secondary roles in Spanish fiction, a situation which did not change significantly in the last centuries.

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, a popular nineteenth-century novelist from Valencia, departs from the traditional concept of woman as subordinate to man. The object of this thesis is to demonstrate that many of his feminine characters in the Valencian novels are indeed primary, acting as protagonists and influencing other characters, especially their male counterparts. As Grove A. Day comments: "The only marked quality found in all these [Valencian] novels except The Cabin [La barraca] is the succumbing of a young man to the dominance of a woman."<sup>1</sup> In our thesis we shall

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<sup>1</sup>Grove A. Day and Edgar C. Knowlton, Jr., V. Blasco Ibáñez (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 44.

see that the strong females are vital to Blasco's exposition of the plot, his art of characterization, and his style.

The novelist's own opinions, together with the comments of many of his contemporaries, reaffirm the contention that Blasco's Valencian novels are his masterpieces. The second chapter of this thesis will review Blasco's life because many of his personal experiences provide background for his novels. While most critics have highly praised the Valencian novels, they have misjudged the importance of the women in these works. We will first present the consensus of critical opinion concerning Blasco's feminine characters, and will then list the reasons why we classify them as major characters.

Since literature frequently reflects actual situations in the society of the times, we shall discuss the limited opportunities offered to women in nineteenth-century Spain. It will become evident that Blasco's female characters, contrary to general belief, usually have more freedom than most women actually did at that time.

In order to present a comprehensive analysis of Blasco's principal female characters, this study will focus on four of the six Valencian novels: Flor de Mayo, Arroz y tartana, Entre naranjos, and Cañas y barro. All of the feminine characters in these four novels share the common

experience of living in nineteenth-century Valencia, although they have different personalities and diverse social backgrounds.

La barraca, one of Blasco's most popular Valencian novels, is excluded from our study because this novel's principal protagonists are indeed men, the women having been assigned secondary roles.

Also excluded from our analysis is Sónnica la cortesana because the setting, the famous siege of Sagunto in 219 B.C., is considered too distant in time to be compared with those in nineteenth-century Valencia. In fact, many critics do not even include Sónnica la cortesana in the Valencian group. It should be noted, however, that Sónnica, the female protagonist, is portrayed as a dominant, primary character.

In the discussion of Entre naranjos, we focus our study on doña Bernarda instead of Leonora, the principal protagonist. Although she was born in Valencia, Leonora travels extensively and loses many of her Valencian traits. Her characterization is more closely associated with those in Blasco's later psychological and cosmopolitan novels.

In order to better organize the feminine characters in the four novels studied, we have divided them into two groups:

- (1) "Crude, Masculine Fisherwomen" (Dolores, Rosario, Tía Tona, and Tía Picores of Flor de Mayo) - Chapter II

- (2) "Domineering, Materialistic Widows" (doña Manuela of Arroz y tartana, doña Bernarda of Entre naranjos, and Neleta of Cañas y barro) - Chapter III

At the beginning of each of these two chapters, there is a short introduction which includes critical evaluation about the particular work, and Blasco's personal experiences which may have influenced the novel or the characters. The principal female characters are then analyzed individually, taking into consideration their physical descriptions, their general personalities, and their roles in the novels, especially as wives, mothers, lovers, and friends. The author's ability to develop his feminine characters as credible, dynamic individuals while creating extensive interaction among them is also discussed.

Chapter IV consists of two basic parts: (1) general similarities shared by all of the seven women studied, and (2) major themes found in the four novels analyzed, with supplementary references to Blasco's later work, Los enemigos de la mujer (1919). In this novel, Blasco's comments about women, particularly about their relationship with death, love, and greed, will help to explain his depiction of the feminine characters in the Valencian novels.

Our study will finally demonstrate that Blasco's female characters are noteworthy as pioneers in the struggle to emancipate women from centuries of injustice, prejudice, and second-class citizenship.

## CHAPTER I

### VICENTE BLASCO IBÁÑEZ, HIS LIFE AND HIS TIMES

Spain has had an illustrious, yet turbulent past. The period from 1868 through the third decade of the twentieth century constitutes the most recent evidence of that restlessness. The various movements for liberty and democracy that were prevalent in Europe at that time encountered staunch opposition in Spain from a conservative oligarchy comprised of the monarchy, the clergy, the nobility, the army, and the wealthy landowners. Those who supported the new liberal ideas eventually challenged the oligarchy's absolute control. This confrontation, together with the government's internal disputes, led to numerous political upheavals, such as the Carlist Wars, the "Glorious Revolution" of 1868, the failures of the Republican governments of 1873 and 1931-1936, and the disastrous Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. Added to these domestic problems, Spain experienced defeat by the Moors in North Africa, the revolution in Cuba, and the war with the United States in 1898. This era of political and social turmoil resulted in pessimism and apathy in Spain, which eventually led to her policy of isolationism in world affairs.

Nevertheless Vicente Blasco Ibáñez did not allow the prevailing sentiment of defeatism to dim his expectations or ambitions. Instead he continued to fight for his political beliefs, in particular, for a successful Republican government in Spain. José Balseiro comments about Blasco's perseverance:

Tres décadas de trágicas incertidumbres  
y de ruinas irreparables no pudieron  
paralizar a Blasco. Inquietaron para  
siempre su espíritu. Y --ese es su vigor--  
acuciáronle el empeño de reconstruir por medio  
del trabajo en favor de España y de la  
humana justicia.<sup>1</sup>

Blasco's life (1867-1928),<sup>2</sup> like his novels, is filled with action and pathos. He was born in Valencia, the first child of Gaspar Blasco Teruel and Ramona Ibáñez Martínez. Because he suffered from chronic diabetes, young Blasco received special attention from his mother, an affectionate but stern individual. At the age of sixteen, he abandoned the security of his middle class home and went to Madrid to pursue his dream of becoming a writer. He

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<sup>1</sup>José Balseiro, Blasco Ibáñez, Unamuno, Valle-Inclán, Baroja: Cuatro individualistas de España (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>General information concerning Blasco's life was extracted primarily from three sources: J.L. León Roca, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1967); Camille Pitolllet, V. Blasco Ibáñez. Sus novelas y la novela de su vida, trans. by Tulio Moncada (Valencia: Prometeo, 1922); Pilar Tortosa, Tres mujeres en la vida y la obra de Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1972).

began by working as secretary to don Manuel Fernández y González, a prominent author of romantic adventure novels. Six months later, Blasco's distraught mother enlisted the aid of the police to find him, and when he was located, she personally went to Madrid to persuade him to return home.

Reluctantly, following his mother's advice, Blasco entered law school at the University of Valencia. But instead of studying, he spent most of his time wandering through the streets of Valencia, observing the typical daily lives of the people as Galdós had done a few years earlier. Because he detested student life, he rarely attended class and admitted that he passed his courses only by relying on his acute memory and by frantic last minute studying just before his examinations. Despite his lack of concern for his studies, Blasco graduated and was awarded his law degree in 1888.

Two years later (1890), he was forced to flee to France because of his participation in an unsuccessful Republican conspiracy to overthrow the Spanish government. While in Paris, the author studied the works of the French novelists Balzac and Zola, wrote twenty-four articles entitled "Cartas literarias" about his impressions of Paris, began writing a novel, La araña negra, and a historical account, Historia de la revolución española. He also composed many love poems to his fiancée María Blasco Cacho, a refined,

cultured woman whom he married when he returned to Valencia in 1892. Also at this time he began his first major literary production, with the publication of the radical Republican journal, El Pueblo (1894). He later published in this journal three of his best known Valencian novels: Arroz y tartana (1894), Flor de Mayo (1895), and La barraca (1898). Altogether this prolific author wrote twenty-six novels, seven volumes of short stories, six travel books, seventeen historical, political and critical essays, one play, and numerous articles.

Blasco's young adult life can be considered an adventure story in itself, for it included conspiracies, exiles, propaganda trips, secret meetings, and more than thirty incarcerations. He served as deputy to the Cortes from 1904 to 1907, and in 1909 he began a tour through Europe, Asia Minor, and Argentina as a lecturer on Spanish art. In Buenos Aires he was received as an esteemed dignitary and his popularity there encouraged him to establish two utopian colonies, "Cervantes" and "Nueva Valencia," both of which were failures. With the outbreak of World War I, he became a war correspondent for Spanish newspapers. His fame soon broadened into universal popularity with the publication of his war novel Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis (1916). This novel, together with Sangre y arena, Flor de Mayo, El paraíso de las mujeres, and Entre naranjos, was sold



to the new and flourishing film industry in the United States. Blasco became a millionaire and flaunted his wealth by purchasing palaces, villas, and yachts, and by taking trips around the world. His wife María died in January of 1925, and nine months later he married Elena Ortúzar ("Chita"), who had been his lover for many years. In 1928 Blasco died of diabetes at Fontana Rosa, his extravagant villa in Menton, France. He did not live to see his lifelong political dream fulfilled, for it was not until 1931 that the Spanish monarchy was ended. Two years later, his Republican compatriots honored him by moving his remains from France to his native Valencia.

Blasco led an active, exciting life, and it is not surprising that he included many of his experiences in his novels. "Throughout his life he engaged in an impassioned struggle for progress and freedom. He maintained the vigorous spirit of the daring and ardent adventurer, the practical idealist and the dreamer--a spirit which is reflected in all of his writings."<sup>3</sup> By weaving his personal experiences into the plots of his novels, the author adds a certain verisimilitude to his narratives.

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<sup>3</sup>Paul T. Manchester, "Introduction" to La barraca (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), p. ix.

Some of his contemporaries felt that Blasco Ibáñez was the most successful writer of his time;<sup>4</sup> one critic considered him "a man of imagination and dynamic driving power."<sup>5</sup> Camille Pitollet, his major apologist, praises him as one of the greatest writers of his century. Still others have commented that he and Pío Baroja exhibit in their works the last vestiges of the great realistic novel of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> As a literary figure, Blasco has been compared with Lamartine, d'Annunzio, Victor Hugo, Flaubert, Balzac, and especially Emile Zola.

On the other hand, many critics differ significantly about Blasco's literary worth, classifying him merely as a good novelist, but not one who ranks among the best of his century.<sup>7</sup>

In our opinion, Blasco's literary worth lies in the fact that he was an energetic, untiring idealist, and one of the first Spanish writers who felt that the struggles of the working class were worthy of literary treatment. His works were read by all classes of society,

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<sup>4</sup>Aubrey F.G. Bell, Contemporary Spanish Literature (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1925), p. 90.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Lewis Hind, More Authors and I (London: John Lane and the Bodley Head Limited, 1922), p. 169.

<sup>6</sup>Camille Pitollet, "Introduction" to Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>Gómez de Baquero (Andrenio), El renacimiento de la novela española en el siglo XIX (Madrid: Editorial Mundo Latino, 1924), p. 100.

allowing him to become not only a champion of the common man but also a member of elite literary circles. The widespread acceptance of his novels was due primarily to his ability to create intriguing plots, credible characters, and realistic depictions of nineteenth-century Spain. Examples of all these elements can be found in his Valencian novels: Arroz y tartana (1894), Flor de Mayo (1895), La barraca (1898), Entre naranjos (1900), Sónnica la cortesana (1901), and Cañas y barro (1902). Blasco Ibañez portrayed his native land of Valencia better than anyone else had done before: "Las novelas valencianas revelan al mundo entero el alma de una raza, el alma de un ambiente y el alma de un paisaje."<sup>8</sup>

Blasco's personal comments about his Valencian novels are worthy of notice. In the foreword to Flor de Mayo, he tells of his special preference for these works: "Amo mis primeras novelas con la predilección que sienten los ricos por los hijos nacidos en su época de pobreza."<sup>9</sup> He then describes the difficult conditions under which his first four novels were written. After he had worked all day as editor of the newspaper El Pueblo, he would return home at dawn to write a few pages. Considering these circumstances, there is an amazing unity found in these novels.

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<sup>8</sup>Pedro Gómez Martí, Psicología del pueblo valenciano según las novelas de Blasco Ibañez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1923), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup>Vicente Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. I (7th edition; Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), pp. 9-12.

Also in these early works, the author developed his literary techniques which in many aspects illustrate Fernán Caballero's dictum: "La novela no se inventa, se observa."<sup>10</sup> Since Blasco felt that observation, spontaneity, and impulsiveness were more important than correct grammar, he did not spend long hours planning, writing, and revising his works. He once commented: "Mis ojos son cámaras cinematográficas . . . que recogen e impresionan cada detalle."<sup>11</sup> Blasco never thought of himself as a man of letters, and he considered his personal experience the best source of material for his novels.

In contrast to his lack of concern for grammatical preciseness, Blasco takes great care in providing us with exacting, detailed descriptions of his characters and their environment, which demonstrates Emile Zola's influence. Like the French writer, he has the talent to create exciting dramatic and melodramatic scenes and climaxes. This ability, coupled with a wide imagination, results in several very vivid and forceful portrayals of crowd scenes.<sup>12</sup> Zola's

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<sup>10</sup>It is not known where or when Fernán Caballero made this celebrated statement. The above citation is from Richard E. Chandler and Kessel Schwartz, A History of Spanish Literature (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 228.

<sup>11</sup>Balseiro, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Roman Guthrie and George E. Diller, French Literature and Thought Since the Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942), p. 405.

influence can further be seen in the author's role as an objective witness to his novels, which basically dwell on the negative, sordid aspects of life.

And yet, despite the similarities between the two writers, it is felt that "Zola es naturalista por principio y Blasco lo es por temperamento."<sup>13</sup> Blasco never adheres solely to naturalistic methods in his works, but combines naturalism with traditional realism and costumbrismo. His narratives never become mere scientific case histories. He makes use of local color and even occasionally has his characters use the popular dialect,<sup>14</sup> thereby creating a background of authentic realism for his stories.

Because the local environment is so much a part of the characters and the plots, Blasco always presents a detailed account of the surroundings. Real men working with or struggling against their environment provide the basis for the novels. "Man is crushed by nature, not in his separateness from it but because he is one with it.

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<sup>13</sup>Joaquín Ortega, "Vicente Blasco Ibáñez," University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, no. 20 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1924), p. 237.

<sup>14</sup>Martín Domínguez Barberá in his four volume study, El tradicionalismo de un republicano, Tomo III, (Sevilla: Ediciones Montejurra, 1962), contends not only that Blasco employs the actual Valencian dialect in certain instances, but also that the overall style in his novels reflects the intonation, vocabulary, and unorthodox grammar of the spoken Valencian language.

On the basis of this oneness the author builds an unusually strong singleness of narrative effect."<sup>15</sup> Although nature is depicted as overpowering man, Blasco's scenic descriptions are, for the most part, examples of surprising lyric beauty.

In addition to picturesque descriptions of landscape, the personality and temperament of the Valencian people are also carefully detailed. His characters are usually simple, rude, and violent--common types found in many regionalistic novels. But it is the variety and intensity of the characterizations that are significant.

. . . tenemos en cuerpo y alma a los burgueses, artesanos, pescadores y huertanos de Valencia, y fulgurantes perspectivas de la ciudad, del mar, del cielo y de la huerta. Todo ello con la vitalidad que en sus libros pone este novelista esencialmente dinámico.<sup>16</sup>

Since Blasco deals mainly with types found in a particular locale, he has been criticized for not presenting the individual personalities of his characters, and for offering little insight into their psychological development. His characters are indeed static beings whose personalities do not change significantly throughout the novel.

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<sup>15</sup>Sherman H. Eoff, The Modern Spanish Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 119.

<sup>16</sup>M. Romera-Navarro, Historia de la literatura española (New York: D.C. Heath and Co., 1928), pp. 655-656.

His expertise is more evident in his external observations of his characters. Often he presents detailed and even lengthy physical descriptions:

Tenía Blasco Ibañez, extraordinariamente desarrollada la fuerza comunicativa de las impresiones de carácter físico. Las captadas por los ojos, por el oído, por el olfato, encuentran en su pluma vivo, aunque rudo instrumento para transplantarlas a la percepción de sus lectores.<sup>17</sup>

The reader usually has little difficulty in forming a mental image of how the characters look and act.

Strangely enough, most critics have failed, purposely or unconsciously, to recognize the major role that women play in Blasco's novels. In fact, most critics believe that his feminine characters are unimportant, subservient, masculine, and unromantic. Unsubstantiated comments, such as those that follow by Joaquín Ortega, are common:

La mujer ocupa un puesto secundario en la obra de Blasco: son las sumisas, las débiles, las humildes, las víctimas . . . Blasco no cree en el destino de la mujer, para él es un objeto de placer, algo que ha de conquistarse en la ruta de la vida; un adorno más en la sala de trofeos del luchador.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Balseiro, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>Ortega, op. cit., p. 229.

Furthermore, Ortega points to the fact that there are twice as many male characters as there are female to prove that Blasco intended that his feminine characters should play secondary roles.<sup>19</sup> Aubrey F.G. Bell contends that "it is doubtful whether the reader will be able to remember any of his heroines."<sup>20</sup>

In order to fully comprehend the reasons that Blasco's feminine characters are, indeed, memorable and important, it is imperative that we first consider them in a historical perspective. The nineteenth century was an era of political, social, and economic change throughout the world. The French Revolution as well as the burgeoning growth of the United States brought progressive democratic ideas to the foreground. Also industrialization led to the emergence of a stronger and larger middle class, thus beginning a shift in the balance of economic and social power. Spain's contribution to the current movements for liberalism officially began with the Constitution of 1812, in which civil equality, equitable taxation, and personal freedom were guaranteed. Although Fernando VII's return to the throne in 1813 ended this brief period of social awakening, the Constitution of 1812 stands as a symbol of Spain's valiant

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>20</sup>Bell, op. cit., p. 94.



effort to inaugurate a more representative government, with many of its proposals influencing Spanish ideology in the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the spirit of reform during the nineteenth century, which this study merely touches upon, suffice it to say that women, and especially Spanish women, did not share in the majority of the men's newly acquired rights and privileges. Since tradition, unfavorable laws, and prejudices had deprived women of equal status with men for centuries, it was unrealistic to expect attitudes to change overnight. A considerable number of literary polemics during the late nineteenth century centered around the acceptable status of women; many social critics still staunchly believed that domestic duties should supercede any of the recent educational or professional opportunities which were now available.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the general historical data herein is based on Rafael Altamira y Crevea, Historia de España y de la civilización española, Vol. I, II, III, IV (Barcelona: Sucesores de Juan Gili, 1928-1930) and Vol. V of the same work by Pío Zabala y Lera (1930).

<sup>22</sup>An example of such a dispute can be found in an article by Emilio de Girardin, "La mujer igual al hombre, contestación á 'Las mujeres que matan y las mujeres que votan' de Alejandro Dumas," trans. into Spanish by Sañudo Autran, Revista contemporánea, XXX (Dec. 1880), no. 121, 354-359.

The Spanish woman's position was even worse than that of her European sisters, for her long history of subservience and total dependence on men, together with her own apathetic attitude towards emancipation, thwarted any popular support for the feminine cause. Emilia Pardo Bazán, a highly esteemed woman of that time, maintained that the Spaniard's obstinacy in changing his attitudes was the primary cause of female subordination. She describes the status of the female's world in nineteenth-century Spain as regressive, instead of progressive:

. . . la distancia social entre los dos sexos es hoy mayor que era en la España antigua, porque el hombre ha ganado derechos y franquicias que la mujer no comparte . . . Libertad de enseñanza, libertad de cultos, derecho de reunión, sufragio, parlamentarismo, sirven para que media sociedad (la masculina) gane fuerzas y actividades,<sup>23</sup> a expensas de la otra media femenina.

Many of the prominent male Spanish writers, such as José María de Pereda, for example, further worsened the female's situation by condemning womanhood in general.<sup>24</sup> He professed that a man could not reap any redeeming benefits from a relationship with a woman and he described Spanish

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<sup>23</sup>Emilia Pardo Bazán, "La mujer española," La España Moderna, mayo, (1890), p. 109.

<sup>24</sup>Many of Pereda's scathing remarks about women are included in his sketch "La mujer del ciego," in Pereda's Obras completas, Tomo VII, Esbozos y Rasguños (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suárez, 1912), pp. 195-211.

women, in particular, as flirtatious sirens who entice men only to use them for their own self-betterment.

It is indeed true that throughout Europe, Spanish women were noted for their skill in coquetry. John Effinger in his book Women of the Romance Countries comments about the Spanish woman's condition: "Now they are often veritable children, who know nothing of affairs at home or of the world abroad, somewhat proud of their manifest charms and ever ready for a conquest; . . ." <sup>25</sup> But we should not be too harsh in judging their flirtatious manner, since society had restricted their actions to such an extreme that their coquettish behavior was one of the few ways in which they could exhibit self-expression.

Women were expected to remain at home and fulfill their two functions in life: to be a wife and mother. Guy de Maupassant expressed this common nineteenth-century view, which is especially pertinent to Spanish thought: "Woman on earth has two roles to play, quite distinct roles--but both of them charming--Love and Maternity . . ." <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> John R. Effinger, Women of Romance Countries (Philadelphia: Rittenhouse Press, 1908), p. 401.

<sup>26</sup> Guy de Maupassant, "Preface" to Abbé Prévost, History of Manon Lescaut and of Le Chevalier des Grieux (New York: Brentano, n.d.), pp. ix-xvi. Since this edition of Abbé Prévost's novel could not be found, the English translation of Guy de Maupassant's statement was extracted from: Germaine Bree, Women Writers in France (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973), p. 33.

To compound her situation, the woman usually had little choice in either of her two preordained roles, for Spanish marriages were usually arranged by the girl's parents with no thought of the couple's compatibility. The young girl, however, accepted these terms because through marriage she could free herself of many of the stricter limitations placed on the single girl.

Once married, a woman was expected to consecrate her life to her family's needs. Submission, seclusion, and dependence were the principal attributes of the exemplary wife. In other words, "La esposa modelo sigue siendo la de cien años hace."<sup>27</sup> Loyalty was also considered one of the wife's "domestic virtues," regardless of her husband's infidelity. Langdon-Davies refers to the accepted, and often expected, double standard in Spanish marriages as " . . . the morals of don Juan Tenorio being applied to a society of living men and women."<sup>28</sup>

Although the wife wielded little power over her husband, she did have a considerable degree of influence on her children. The mother's first duty was to teach her children to honor their father's name and heritage. Second, and more important, she was directly responsible for instilling

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<sup>27</sup>Pardo Bazán, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>28</sup>John Langdon-Davies, "The Spanish Woman," Harper's Monthly Magazine, CLIX (1929), p. 713.

in them a sense of social, moral, and educational values. Unfortunately, the majority of Spanish women were not capable of instructing their children properly because they themselves lacked sufficient knowledge and educational background.

Most Spanish girls did not have the opportunity to receive an adequate education in the public schools. Although a system was created in 1768 for primary education, many of the schools closed during the first quarter of the nineteenth century due to lack of teachers and funds. The religious convent schools, with their limited resources, were usually the young girl's only alternative, for few could afford to hire a tutor or to travel to another country. By the middle of the century, the Spanish primary system became more stable, and there was an increase in the number of girls attending. It was not until the latter part of the century that secondary education was offered to women, and then only a small percentage of girls chose to continue their schooling.

Although the number of educational opportunities for women increased during the nineteenth century, the quality of the courses of studies did not change significantly from that offered by the old convent schools. Concepción Arenal succinctly summarizes the situation: "La educación que se da en España a las niñas es el arte de perder el tiempo."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Elvira Martín, Tres mujeres gallegas del siglo XIX (Barcelona: Editorial Aedos, 1962), p. 29.

Even a girl from an affluent family did not learn the importance of personal health and hygiene, much less any of the domestic skills, such as cooking, cleaning and proper care of children.<sup>30</sup> The average young girl was taught only the "obligations of her sex" and sufficient introduction to the humanities and the arts to appear cultured. This superficial education, which included such subjects as Classical languages, geography, music, and painting, provided little intellectual stimulation.

A typical Spanish girl's education in nineteenth-century Spain can be illustrated by the upbringing of Blasco's mother and his wife. Both Ramona, his mother, and María, his wife, were considered educated, refined women of their time. Ramona attended a convent school where she learned the principles of Christian living, including the woman's place in society and the importance of religion. She also learned how to can and preserve food, to embroider, and to crochet.<sup>31</sup> María had a broader education, for she also spoke French, played piano, and painted; in short, she was deemed a lady.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Emilia Pardo Bazán, "La mujer española," La España Moderna, julio (1890), p. 125.

<sup>31</sup>Pilar Tortosa, Tres mujeres en la vida y la obra de Vicente Blasco Ibañez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1972), p. 15.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-82.

Even though the woman's limited education was accepted and even fostered by most of the intellectuals of the day, a few individuals of foresight, realizing woman's potential, blamed her intellectual inferiority on her sub-standard education.<sup>33</sup> And yet despite this handicap there was a small number of nineteenth-century Spanish women who attained respect and recognition, sometimes on an international level. A brief account of the specific struggles they experienced in Spain's archaic school system and of the prejudice they had to overcome to achieve success will help to emphasize the woman's predicament.

Cecilia Böhl de Faber (1796-1877), the first famous woman writer of nineteenth-century Spain, felt that she had to adopt the male pseudonym "Fernán Caballero" for her novels to be received favorably by society. The assumption that her sex would hinder her acceptance as a writer proved to be quite true. The Belgian government granted the honor of admitting her into the Order of Leopold, but retracted the award when they discovered that she was a woman.<sup>34</sup> A similar

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<sup>33</sup>John Stuart Mill was one of the principal advocates of broadening women's education. His monumental work, The Subjection of Women (1869), still stands today as one of the most distinguished publications for women's rights.

<sup>34</sup>Emiliano Diez-Echarri and José María Roca Franquesa, Historia de la literatura española e hispanoamericana (Madrid: Aguilar, 1968), p. 860.

situation took place in 1853 when Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873) was considered for a vacant seat in the Spanish Academy. After a lengthy debate, the Academy decided that women were not eligible to become members of that prestigious body.<sup>35</sup>

Spain's most avid protestor against the inequalities between male and female educational opportunities was Concepción Arenal de García Carrasco (1820-1893).<sup>36</sup> In order to be accepted into the University of Madrid, Concepción Arenal had to dress as a boy, and she continued to wear masculine attire so that she could travel through the city without a maid or dueña. After her husband's death, Arenal continued writing articles for La Iberia. At first, she signed his name to the articles, since few people would accept a socially and politically informed female. Later, after she had demonstrated her own ability in other publications, she began to broaden the scope of her reform programs by protesting against not only the inequities between the sexes, but also the deplorable conditions experienced by various minority groups: prisoners, impoverished workers, and mental patients. Because of her humanitarianism,

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<sup>35</sup>Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, Baltasar, ed. by Carlos Bransby (New York: American Book Company, 1908), pp. 18-19.

<sup>36</sup>Data on Concepción Arenal's life was extracted from: Manuel Casás Fernández, Concepción Arenal. Su vida y su obra (Madrid: Librería General de Victoriano Suarez, 1936).



she was highly esteemed by her contemporaries: "Concepción del Arenal llega a ser la mujer más popular del siglo XIX, a pesar de su apartamiento de todo lo mundano. Encarna las ideas filantrópicas cristianas y las rebeldías liberales."<sup>37</sup>

Although the three women cited, Cecilia Böhl de Faber, Gertrudis de Avellaneda, and Concepción Arenal, tried to promote the cause of equality, they were quite different from the ardent feminists of the twentieth century. Spanish women, even the educated ones of the past century, believed in male supremacy. They simply fought for less discrimination and more educational and professional opportunities for women.

Because a woman's social and economic class had a great effect on the manner in which society viewed her, a study of the female's position in nineteenth-century Spain cannot be complete without considering the different social strata. In Spanish society at that time, there were three distinct levels: the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, and the proletariat, with each class having its own peculiar characteristics.<sup>38</sup>

The aristocratic or noble woman led a carefree existence, generally having no financial difficulties

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<sup>37</sup>Martín, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>38</sup>Information about the different social classes of nineteenth-century Spanish women was derived primarily from two sources: Emilia Pardo Bazán, "La mujer española," La España Moderna, mayo, junio, julio, septiembre (1890), pp. 101-154; Fernando Díaz-Plaja, La vida española en el siglo XIX (Madrid: Afrodiseo Aguado, S.A., 1952).

and being envied and even emulated by the rest of Spanish feminine society. Her major problem consisted in finding enough proper or acceptable activities to occupy her excess leisure hours. According to custom, shopping, bullfights, balls, and the theater were considered appropriate pastimes for a refined lady. Also, since French culture was fashionable in Spain at that time, the refined woman could enhance her elegance by speaking French, reading French literature, and buying the latest Parisian dresses.

The bourgeoisie tried to imitate the noblewoman in every possible manner. Unfortunately, too many middle class women displayed only a vulgar approximation of elegance, and thus arose the Spanish view of cursilería, or "querer y no poder." The distinguishing characteristics of the middle class woman as opposed to the lower class were that the former dressed fashionably, kept at least one maid, and had a sitting room in her house. Working outside the home was inconceivable for a woman of her class, a situation which forced the middle class woman to rely on her father, husband, brother, or another male relative for financial support.

The working woman, which included the humble country peasant and farm woman, the city factory worker, cigarette vendor or the like, was not confined by society's mores as were the middle and upper class women; therefore she had a more versatile if even more difficult life. The

poor female was usually forced to work; financial necessity had set her free from the "proletarian" stigma. And yet through her diverse experience and her independent nature, the working woman usually gained in practical knowledge what she lost in social prestige. Most critics comment about the lower class woman's basic intelligence and her capacity to lead others, including her male counterparts.<sup>39</sup>

And it is the working woman, specifically the rural woman, about whom Blasco writes in the majority of his Valencian novels. Attracted to Valencia's coast and its neighboring countryside, Blasco became familiar with the inhabitants of these areas. Thus he was able to depict realistically the rural Valencian woman. She was a worker, usually a partner with her husband; at times she even surpassed his efforts in manual labor. Although she generally did not plow land, hunt animals, or catch fish, she was responsible, at the very least, for selling the products of her husband's labor.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>The peasant or countrywoman's superiority is emphasized in the following works: Rafael Altamira y Crevea, "La mujer española a través de la historia," Cuadernos americanos, XXXII (1947), no. 2, p. 200; Clayton Sedgwick Cooper, Understanding Spain (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1928), p. 137.

<sup>40</sup>Pedro Gómez Martí, Psicología del pueblo valenciano según las novelas de Blasco Ibañez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1932), pp. 140-142.

There is unfortunately a lack of documented material about the Valencian working woman of the nineteenth century. However, we can conclude from the information which is available that Blasco's portrayal of the rugged male and the masculine female is realistic and that he depicts the Valencian temperament with a surprising degree of accuracy. A.F. Calvert in his book Valencia and Murcia describes some of the qualities of the typical Valencian, and Blasco's characters exhibit many of these same traits.

In character the Valencians are superstitious, revengeful, relentless in hate. "Ni olvido, ni perdono" is their motto. They love colour and joy of life. Dancing and love-making are their chief delights. And yet they are a laborious race.<sup>41</sup>

Later in this study, it will become evident that Blasco has captured this spirit of the Valencian female laborer, especially in Dolores, Rosario, Tía Tona, and Tía Picores of Flor de Mayo, and Neleta of Cañas y barro.

He has also described accurately the Valencian middle class lady in doña Manuela of Arroz y tartana and doña Bernarda of Entre naranjos. In the characterization of doña Bernarda, Blasco blends the independence and authoritativeness of the rural woman with the pragmatism of the bourgeoisie.

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<sup>41</sup>A.F. Calvert, Valencia and Murcia (New York: John Lane Company, 1911), p. 2.

On the other hand, doña Manuela offers an excellent example of the unthinking, irresponsible, cursi middle class woman who spends her entire life trying to imitate the customs of the affluent.

Whenever possible, we will compare the attitudes and idiosyncracies of Blasco's feminine characters with what is known of those of Valencian women of the nineteenth century. However, since there is little historical information on the Valencian woman per se,<sup>42</sup> our main frame of reference will be comparisons with nineteenth-century Spanish women in general.

Blasco's female characters, like the majority of the women of their time, had to face many obstacles: social prejudices, lack of opportunities, and inadequate education. Yet unlike their historical counterparts they do not live a life of seclusion and submission. Blasco does not adhere to the traditional concept of the revered mother, the respected, loyal wife, and the complacent housekeeper. In fact, he rarely extols the virtues of the wife and mother, and his feminine characters are not content

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<sup>42</sup>Personal observations (usually extremely idealized) about the Valencian woman can be found in the following works: Enrique Pérez Escrich, "La mujer valenciana," Costumbristas españoles, Vol. II, ed. Evaristo Correa Calderón (Madrid: Aguilar, 1951), pp. 497-503; José Zapater y Ugeda, "La valenciana," Costumbristas españoles, Vol. II, ed. Evaristo Correa Calderón (Madrid: Aguilar, 1951), pp. 255-261; L. Higgin, Spanish Life in Town and Country (Detroit: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904).

with these roles as their principal objectives in life. Furthermore, they seldom yield to parental pressure in their choice of a husband, and when they do marry they are far from subservient. Some of them have extra-marital affairs and still others use their families to achieve their own personal goals. It is this basic concern for their own well-being which separates Blasco's feminine characters from exemplary wives and mothers. They are more self-sufficient, more independent, and in general more worldly than average nineteenth-century women of their class. They are not portrayed as gentle, subordinate homemakers, but rather as domineering heads of households.

The author's real life relationships with women, particularly his mother and his wives, greatly influenced his depiction of his heroines. He copies in his works not only their physical attributes, but also their personality traits. It is the aim of this study to demonstrate that certain feminine characters in Blasco's Valencian novels reflect the author's personal experiences, and that these characters provide examples of the changing attitudes of women from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

## CHAPTER II

### CRUDE, MASCULINE FISHERWOMEN

Blasco's second novel, Flor de Mayo (1895), has received much praise and together with La barraca and Cañas y barro has been rated as one of his three best works.<sup>1</sup> Because of its popularity, the name of the street on which the author was born was changed from La calle de la Jabonería Nueva to Flor de Mayo.<sup>2</sup> Like most of his Valencian novels, the plot and the setting of Flor de Mayo are based on first-hand experiences, specifically those which relate to his trips to El Cabañal, a small fishing village near Valencia.

Blasco always admired the seafaring villagers of El Cabañal and he frequented the beaches there, talking with the natives and visiting their homes. Two specific incidents, however, served as particular inspiration for the novel Flor de Mayo: Blasco's sailing on a ship loaded with contraband goods from El Cabañal to the coast of Argel

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<sup>1</sup>Angel del Río, Historia de la literatura española, Vol. II (Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili, S.A., 1957), p. 218.

<sup>2</sup>Paul T. Manchester, "Introduction" to La barraca (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), p. vii.

and his experience of being marooned during a storm on a small island in the gulf of Valencia.<sup>3</sup>

Linking his own adventures with his special talent for capturing local color, the novelist creates a convincing background for his narrative. Because of his graphic descriptions of the fishermen and their environment Blasco Ibañez's Flor de Mayo has been compared to Palacio Valdés' José and Pereda's Sotileza.<sup>4</sup>

Blasco combines drama and realism to make the scenes and characters true-to-life. The women appear virile, but considering their environment and their work, a masculine depiction of them is credible. Havelock Ellis has observed that Blasco is not the first author to present his women characters in this fashion. The Spanish Golden Age dramatist Tirso de Molina also has a liberal attitude toward the portrayal of his feminine characters: ". . . he [Tirso] seems to regard virility as a quality apart from sex, and bestows it on women as well as men."<sup>5</sup> Blasco's portrayal of virile women is especially evident in Flor de Mayo because both the men and the women are required to do strenuous manual labor and to have strong, persevering characters.

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<sup>3</sup>Grove A. Day and Edgar C. Knowlton, Jr., V. Blasco Ibañez (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 48.

<sup>4</sup>Emiliano Diez-Echarri and José María Roca Franquesa, Historia de la literatura española e hispanoamericana (Madrid: Aguilar, 1968), p. 1116.

<sup>5</sup>Havelock Ellis, The Soul of Spain (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1908), p. 96



The author's initial introduction to the female characters in Flor de Mayo establishes their depiction throughout the remainder of the novel. After commenting about the sights, smells, and colors of El Cabañal he describes the fisherwomen:

Sólo faltaban las pescaderas, rebaño  
sucio, revuelto y pingajoso, que  
ensordecía con gritos e impregnaba el  
ambiente con el olor de pescado podrido  
y un aura salitrosa del mar conservada  
entre los pliegues de sus zagalejos.<sup>6</sup>

He portrays the women as an undistinguishable group of laborers, who, with their stench of rotten fish and salt water, are manifestations of the sea's destructive powers. Such naturalistic dehumanization becomes more significant when we are later introduced to the four major characters in Flor de Mayo.

### Dolores

We consider Dolores, the first important fisherwoman presented in the novel, to be the principal female protagonist. Since Blasco usually provides us with an adequate description

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<sup>6</sup>Vicente Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. I (7th edition; Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 396.

of his major characters, we are not surprised at the numerous details he gives us of Dolores' physical appearance:

Era una morena cariancha, con el rubio y alborotado pelo como una aureola en torno de la pequeña frente. Sus ojos verdes tenían la oscura transparencia del mar, y en ciertos momentos reflejábanse la luz en ellos abriendo un círculo brillante de puntos dorados.

Reía como una loca, entreabriendo sus mandíbulas poderosas de hembra de sólida osamenta. Los labios carnosos, de un rojo tostado, mostraban al separarse una dentadura igual, fuerte y tan brillante, que parecía iluminar la cara con la pálida claridad del marfil.

Here the author employs naturalism in his description of Dolores with terms usually applicable to animals: "alborotado pelo," "mandíbulas poderosas," "hembra," and "labios carnosos." Vivid phrases such as these emphasize Dolores' physical strength as well as her aggressive nature.

Portrayed as a mixture of masculine sturdiness and feminine sensuality, Dolores is also frequently referred to as proud, insolent, and aloof. Although she is an uncultured laborer, her fashionable appearance, her flirtatious character, and her haughty independence separate her from her fellow workers. This distinction, however, is not a result of her upbringing, since her childhood, filled with poverty and squalor, was not much different

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 398.

from that experienced by her neighbors in El Cabañal.

Although her father was a truck driver, who was perennially drunk, Dolores overcomes her social handicaps by marrying El Retor, a relatively wealthy fisherman compared to those in El Cabañal. Because he can afford to buy her luxuries, such as pearl necklaces and fancy petticoats, Dolores becomes the envy of her fellow fisherwomen:

. . . se daba ella sus airecillos de reina entre la turba desvergonzada y miserable de la Pescadería, y apretaba los labios con satisfacción cuando admiraban sus pendientes de perlas o los pañuelos de Argel y los refajos<sup>8</sup> de Jibraltar regalados por el Retor.

Even though Dolores' fascination with pearls is typical of the times,<sup>9</sup> she does not share many other interests with her neighbors. Her concern for and compassion toward others takes second place to her own preoccupations.

Dolores' self-centered attitude is especially apparent in her marriage to El Retor. She marries him simply because she is interested in his money, his devotion to her, and his status as the most eligible bachelor in the village. After they are married, Dolores becomes

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>9</sup>In nineteenth-century Spain, pearl necklaces were an enviable possession. According to Pérez Escrich, owning a pearl necklace was every woman's dream.

Enrique Pérez Escrich, "La mujer valenciana" *Costumbristas españoles*, Vol. II, ed. by E. Correa Calderón (Madrid: Aguilar, 1951), p. 499.

a domineering wife, with her husband being referred to as "un buenazo que la obedecía en todo."<sup>10</sup> She uses El Retor strictly for her personal gain and there is never a mention of her love for him.

On the other hand, Dolores' feelings are noticeably stronger towards her lover Tonet, for whom she feels physical attraction, if not affection. When she first begins her relationship with Tonet, she appears weak and subservient and even steals from her father for him: "Dolores le repasaba la ropa y hasta hurgaba en los bolsillos de tío Paella para dar dinero al novio, . . ."<sup>11</sup> After marrying El Retor, she renews her affair with Tonet, but with a different attitude. She is now more confident of his affection and does not have to be submissive to all of his wishes. Thus in her relationship with both her husband and her lover Dolores is ultimately the domineering partner.

Likewise we can deduce that she exercises the same powerful influence over her children: "En casa de Dolores, de la gran maldecida, que sin duda, les había dado a sus hijos polvos seguidores, pues corrían a ella como perros sumisos."<sup>12</sup> While Blasco mentions that Dolores has a number of children, he only offers specific details about Pascualet, the child from her illicit affair with Tonet.

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<sup>10</sup>Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 398.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 417.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 420.

However, Dolores' role as a mother is not important to the development of her characterization. Her selfish, vain personality prohibits her from displaying any maternal concern. The sole incident in which she shows any sign of affection occurs at the end of the novel when Pascualet's body is discovered. Only then does Dolores appear maternal as she mourns her son's death.

Dolores is always too preoccupied with herself to be aware of the needs of her family. Furthermore, since she assumes that she is better than her peers, she devotes very little time to friends. The only woman she values as her equal is Tía Picores, the leader among the fisherwomen.

Blasco's portrayal of Dolores as wife, lover, mother, and friend does not vary considerably from one role to another because emphasis is placed more on her forceful characteristics than on what would normally be considered feminine traits. He portrays her as a stoic, independent, unchanging individual whose primary aim is her own self-betterment. Blasco describes only her bad qualities, with her physical beauty being her sole redeeming feature.

Although the author presents a one-sided view of her personality, Dolores remains a credible character. She is the type of person who always dominates those

who surround her, especially her family. All of her goals are achieved: she has a doting husband, a faithful lover, submissive children, and an enviable social position. Despite the fact that the narrative ends tragically, we feel that Dolores will survive, start a new life, and be successful in whatever plans she makes for the future.

### Rosario

Dolores' sister-in-law and major adversary is Rosario, Tonet's wife. Because Rosario is considered a minor character, there is little significant critical evaluation of her. And yet she is important, for she acts as a direct contrast to Dolores.

The author does not offer us a precise physical description of Rosario, but he frequently refers to her frail appearance and, on occasion, describes her as a "mujercita flaca y nerviosa."<sup>13</sup> He also displays naturalistic tendencies in his comparison of Rosario to animals, such as "un gallo flaco"<sup>14</sup> and "una perra rabiosa."<sup>15</sup>

In general Rosario's personality matches her physical appearance: she is weak, introverted, and subservient.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 403.

Her submissive nature is most evident in her relationship with Tonet.

As a wife she feels that it is her responsibility to please her husband, to the extent that she allows him to abuse and mistreat her. Although Tonet squanders Rosario's entire inheritance money on his extravagances, she continues to love him and even becomes a fisherwoman so that he does not have to alter his lifestyle. The only instance in which Rosario displays any expression of disloyalty towards her husband is in her confession to El Retor about Dolores' and Tonet's affair. Even then she regrets having told El Retor for fear that he may harm Tonet. We find Rosario, the wife, a pathetic character whose love and sacrifice for her husband are repaid by his adultery and abuse.

Rosario does not have children, but at the end of the novel when Dolores' son's body floats to shore, the author describes Rosario's maternal inclination: "Rosario, la esposa despreciada y estéril, conmovida por la desesperación de esta maternidad gimiente, perdonaba a su rival."<sup>16</sup> Although childless she empathizes with Dolores' loss of her son.

Because Rosario works long hours and because she concentrates on keeping her husband content, she has little time to spend with friends. Tía Tona is her only close

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 478.

acquaintance, and Tona is interested solely in her money and in the prospect of Rosario's becoming her daughter-in-law.

Rosario, a static, predictable character, deviates only twice from her reserved demeanor: first in her violent fight with Dolores in the fish market, and second in her confession to El Retor about Tonet's affair. In this latter scene, which is the climax of the novel, the hitherto inconsequential role of Rosario becomes significant.

For the most part Blasco portrays Rosario as a neutral character--neither good nor bad. Some readers may think of her as basically a good person because of her devotion to her husband, while others may feel that her loyalty is a fault because she is too possessive.

Blasco does not present Rosario as a well-rounded individual; we see her only as Tonet's wife. But in this capacity she is believable. She is typical of an ordinary, dependent person who tries to gain recognition by associating with a colorful or dynamic individual.

In many respects, Rosario resembles Blasco's wife María. He describes the two women as having "ojos oscuros," and although María and Rosario are from different social strata, they both are passive, persevering women who most of the time quietly accept their husbands' infidelities.



Unlike María, who has her children to occupy the major portion of her time, Rosario has neither children nor friends. The only interaction she has with other characters pertains directly to her relationship with Tonet. Marrying him is Rosario's principal objective in life; therefore we can say that, in effect, her goal is attained. At the end of the novel, Tonet dies and Rosario's future looks dismal. However we feel that her grief will be short-lived in contrast to her many years of suffering and neglect as Tonet's wife.

#### Tía Tona

Tía Tona's role, although secondary within the main plot, is nevertheless significant because in many instances she helps to broaden the scope of the narrative. Even though she is not a protagonist, the novel begins with a detailed account of her past, which we later discover relates directly to the lives of all the major characters.

In addition to her influence on other characters, Tona is important as an example of Blasco's masculine depiction of some of his female characters. Tía Tona's virility is seen particularly in the stamina and strength she displays in almost singlehandedly rebuilding and

converting her late husband's shipwrecked boat into a thriving café and bar.

Another noteworthy aspect of Tona's characterization is her capacity to foresee tragic events. When El Retor's boat Flor de Mayo is blessed, Tona has a premonition that her son will die in a shipwreck like his father before him. After the ship departs, a storm arises and she senses that her two sons and her grandson will not return home alive. These two episodes in particular prompted Barbara Bromberg to comment that Tona acts as the Greek chorus does in traditional tragedy: "The female chorus is portrayed by Siña Tona, who like Tío Paloma [in La barraca] figures in the novel as an important member."<sup>17</sup>

The characterization of Tona becomes even more memorable because Blasco provides us with a vivid physical description of her. Although she is somewhat stout, her large black eyes and her dark complexion make her alluring to the fishermen who frequent her tavern. Later, in her old age, her attractiveness fades, and she is described as balding, wrinkled, and having large, sad eyes. Tona attributes her physical deterioration to two factors: abuse by men and hard manual labor. Blasco refers to her on

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<sup>17</sup>Barbara J. Bromberg, "The Tragic Vision in Selected Novels of Blasco Ibañez" (unpublished M.A.thesis, Louisiana State University, 1969), p. 53.

numerous occasions as "una hembra," a term usually applied only to female animals. With this and other naturalistic descriptions, our impression of her as an indefatigable worker is further intensified.

Tona's rugged physical appearance indicates her strong-willed, independent nature. In order to turn her small café into a profitable business, she has to work long, unpredictable hours, often from dawn until midnight, to accommodate the various schedules of the fishermen.

This same determination and stamina are likewise evidenced in her personal family relationships. There are few details about her responsibilities as a wife because when the novel begins she is already a widow. Thus in order to describe Tona's relationship with her husband, the author frequently uses flashbacks. In one particular scene, for example, we see her keeping a vigil for the safe return of her husband which, after many long days, ends with the news of his death. Although she wastes little time in converting his shipwrecked boat into a café, it is financial circumstance and not lack of affection for her deceased husband that forces her into this seemingly heartless action. Furthermore, by examining the various references made to her husband in other passages, we can surmise that Tona cared a great deal for him and that she mourned his loss.

We discover later that her life as a widow is a lonely one, especially after her two sons are grown. These two factors, her loneliness and her maternal longings, lead her into the illicit love affair with the young lieutenant Martínez. Blasco adeptly describes the effect of the relationship on Tona: "Aquella temporada fué para Tona una primavera juvenil en plena madurez de su vida."<sup>18</sup> Martínez's education and his refined manners attract the ignorant, uncultured Tona, and she becomes submissive to all of his wishes. Verne L. Vogt comments:

She is economical and industrious; and the greatest irregularity in her life, her disastrous love affair with the young carabinero, Martínez, was the result of passion and of trustfulness rather than of perversity.<sup>19</sup>

We cannot condemn Tona's behavior, for she shows a sincere interest in the well-being of her lover; unfortunately he does not share her feelings. Martínez later steals her money, abandons her, and leaves her pregnant. Consequently, Tona develops an animosity toward all men which lasts for the rest of her life.

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<sup>18</sup>Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 415.

<sup>19</sup>Verne Lyle Vogt, "Influence of Materialistic Ideas on the Novels of Blasco Ibáñez" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1966), p. 93.

Tona's affair with Martínez can be compared to her relationship with her favorite son Tonet, who repeatedly takes advantage of her despite the special care and attention she always affords him. Unlike Tonet, her other son El Retor is obedient and loving. Yet because he lacks Tonet's zestful enjoyment of life he is often ignored and, at times, even mistreated by his mother. Still, El Retor fares well in comparison with his half-sister Roseta. Because of Tona's memories of the girl's unscrupulous father, Martínez, she treats her daughter in an almost perverted manner. "Criábase como una bestezuela bravía."<sup>20</sup> Such naturalistic details, which deal specifically with Tona's maltreatment of Roseta, are common.<sup>21</sup>

Tía Tona as a mother is a complex individual, who works hard to provide her children with the necessities of life, but at the same time exhibits partiality to Tonet, disinterest in El Retor, and cruelty towards Roseta.

Working long hours in the tavern prohibits Tona from cultivating any friendships. Nevertheless her customers and the women in the village who know her, like and respect her. Rosario is the only person with whom she makes a

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<sup>20</sup>Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 418.

<sup>21</sup>Blasco's most naturalistic descriptions of Roseta can be found on p. 418 of his Obras completas, Vol. I.

special effort to become friendly. As we mentioned above, though, this friendship is motivated by Tona's desire for Rosario to marry her son Tonet.

After taking into consideration the various roles that Tona plays in the narrative, we must conclude that her most significant role is that of a mother. In this capacity alone does Blasco present the many aspects of her diverse personality. It should also be noted that Tona is not a static character and that she eventually alters her opinions, for example, about men in general and about her two sons in particular. This change in her characterization affords the author an opportunity to present both her good and bad qualities. We can admire her for being a loving wife, an unselfish mother, an astute businesswoman, and an affectionate grandmother, but we must condemn her for the favoritism she shows towards her sons and the malevolence she feels towards her daughter.

Her aggressive, independent nature coupled with her influence on the other characters makes Tona one of Blasco's dynamic feminine characters. Because the author presents a detailed physical and psychological portrayal of her, the reader may easily empathize with her weaknesses and admire her strengths. Although she figures in the novel as a minor character, Tona is important because of her interaction and direct relationship with the major protagonists.

Tía Tona has no specific objectives in the novel. Suffice it to say that she preoccupies herself with surviving in a hostile environment and providing for her family. In the end, she is indeed grief-stricken when she loses her two sons and her grandson; however, we can assume that Tona will continue to work and to struggle, and will soon overcome her sorrow.

### Tía Picores

A character similar to Tía Tona in many respects is Tía Picores, the self-acclaimed leader of the fisherwomen. Camille Pitollet describes her as " . . . [una] especie de leona del mercado de la Pescadería; . . ."<sup>22</sup> Although she plays a secondary role, Tía Picores is undoubtedly one of the most interesting characters in Flor de Mayo. Joaquín Ortega agrees with our opinion, and adds that many of Blasco's secondary characters are well-portrayed: "Muchos de sus caracteres secundarios, que nada tienen que ver con la acción principal, son obras maestras de observación, como la tía Picores de Flor de Mayo . . . "<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Camille Pitollet, V. Blasco Ibáñez. Sus novelas y la novela de su vida, trans. by Tulio Moncada (Valencia: Prometeo, 1922), p. 217.

<sup>23</sup>Joaquín Ortega, "Vicente Blasco Ibáñez," University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, no. 21 (1924), p. 229.

The author supplies us with a lengthy description of Tía Picores, depicting her as the huge, indomitable matriarch of the fish market. He employs a considerable number of exaggerated naturalistic descriptions, such as referring to her body as "un cuerpo de anfibio" and "una ballena." From these and other details, we are left with the impressions that she is a very masculine, uncouth woman and that she is psychologically, and even physically, influenced by her marine environment.

La tía Picores mostrábase majestuosa en una alta poltrona, con su blanducha obesidad de ballena vieja contrayendo el arrugado y velloso hocico y mudando de postura para sentir mejor la tibia caricia del braserillo que hasta muy entrado el verano tenía entre sus pies, lujo necesario para su cuerpo de anfibio, impregnado de humedad hasta los huesos. Sus manos amonatasadas no estaban un momento quietas. Una picazón eterna parecía martirizar su arrugada epidermis, y los gruesos dedos hurgaban en los sobacos, se deslizaban bajo el pañuelo, hundiéndose en la maraña gris de cabeza, y tan pronto hacían temblar con tremendos rasguñones el enorme vientre que caía sobre las rodillas cual amplio delantal como con un impudor asombroso arremangaba la complicada faldamenta de los refajos para pellizcar en las hinchadas pantorrillas.<sup>24</sup>

Such repulsive images of Tía Picores as "enormous," "slimy," and "malodorous" make her resemble a gigantic sea animal more than an ordinary fisherwoman.

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<sup>24</sup>Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 401.



Tía Picores' position of authority in the marketplace is respected, to the extent that whenever she shouts her commands everyone obeys without the least objection. "Picor," which has as one of its meanings "the pungent taste left behind by anything which is hot or piquant,"<sup>25</sup> is a fitting name for this outspoken and fiery-natured woman.

Very little is known about Tía Picores' personal life, except that she once had a very submissive husband who is deceased when the novel begins. However we do learn her feelings toward men in the various passages in which she comments about the wiles of men. She berates at length any woman who succumbs to male dominance.

Tía Picores believes in her own supremacy, especially in the marketplace. Because her authority there goes unquestioned, the other fisherwomen, with the exception of the arrogant Dolores, regard her as their superior rather than as their intimate friend.

Her position as overseer of the fisherwomen is the only capacity in which she is described in detail because her roles as wife, lover, mother, and friend are unnecessary for the development of her characterization. We are left, then, with one impression of Tía Picores--that of a tyrannical leader who through her power and influence maintains order

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<sup>25</sup>Mariano Velázquez de la Cadena, Edward Gray, and Juan L. Iribas, A New Pronouncing Dictionary of the Spanish and English Languages (New York: Appleton-Crofts, 1967), p. 498.

in the marketplace. This leadership ability is her one redeeming attribute since Blasco accents only her unfavorable qualities. She remains a static character whose two most adamant convictions, namely her enmity towards men and towards the wealthy villagers, persist throughout the novel.

Although the author offers us a limited view of Tía Picores, she is nevertheless an important character. Her vicious harangues against the villagers and against men are some of the most memorable passages in Flor de Mayo. Tía Picores is truly a dynamic individual. González Blanco refers to Blasco's ability to create characters of "cuerpo entero" and points to Tía Picores as an example:

En todas sus obras hay uno o dos  
que bastarían inmortalizarlas . . .  
En Flor de Mayo este personaje  
colosal es la tía Picores, vieja  
loba, especie de Mammón con faldas,  
entronizada en su puesto de la  
Pescadería como en un regio trono.<sup>26</sup>

The importance of Tía Picores' characterization lies in the fact that she typifies a colorful figure found in the fishing community of El Cabañal. She adds to the verisimilitude of the novel by becoming part of the environment and by making it come alive through her personality, even though her presence does not affect the plot. Her interaction with other characters merely intensifies her position as the indisputable leader of the fish market.

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<sup>26</sup> Andrés González Blanco, Historia de la novela en España desde el romanticismo a nuestros días (Madrid: Saenz de Jubera Hermanos, 1909), pp. 562-563.

Since Tía Picores is not a principal character, the author does not set specific goals for her to accomplish. However, her final speech which ends Flor de Mayo is especially noteworthy. In this soliloquy she blames the villagers for the fishermen's miserable life. She says that because they are unwilling to pay fair prices for fish they thereby force the men and women of El Cabañal to work twice as hard to make a decent living. Tía Picores' message, and indirectly the author's message, stresses that the poor have to fight their inconsiderate, wealthy neighbors as well as a harsh environment in order to attain the basic necessities of life. Only the ruthless, rugged individuals, such as Tía Picores, survive.

### Conclusions

Before completing our discussion of the importance of the female protagonists in Flor de Mayo, it is imperative that we summarize the techniques the author employs in presenting the four major women characters. We will pay particular attention to the naturalistic aspects used in depicting the women, and the differences and similarities of their characterizations.

The first part of our analysis will focus on Blasco's method of introduction, that is, the circumstances that surround each character's initial presentation, and whether or not this initial introduction affords us any clue to the character's personality.

Blasco simply gives us a direct description of Dolores, the first of the female protagonists to be introduced.<sup>27</sup> In this initial description we see her " . . . arqueando la robusta pechuga y sonriendo como un ídolo satisfecho cuando los hombres se fijaban en sus zapatos de cuero amarillo y en el soberbio arranque de sus pantorrillas, cubiertas con medias rojas."<sup>28</sup> From this one short passage, we can conclude that Dolores' dress and demeanor show her to be a provocative woman who projects an arrogant, self-confident attitude.

The author then interrupts his description of Dolores to introduce us to Tía Picores. He emphasizes Tía Picores' physical size and the great respect or, better said, fear which she evokes in other characters: " . . . Agüela Picores, una veterana de la Pescadería, enorme, hinchada

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<sup>27</sup>In Chapter I of Flor de Mayo the author presents three of the four principal female characters within the span of eight short paragraphs, specifically pp. 398-399 of Obras completas, Vol. I.

<sup>28</sup>Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 398.

y bigotuda como una ballena, que hacía cuarenta años tenía aterrados a los alguaciles del mercado con la mirada de sus ojillos insolentes y las palabrotas de su boca hundida, . . ."<sup>29</sup> This depiction of Tía Picores as an influential, forceful individual is later substantiated in the narrative.

Rosario is introduced indirectly, first as "una rezagada" and then as "fielato,"<sup>30</sup> and only later do we find out her name. This indirect technique effectively illustrates the weakness of Rosario's personality, which along with her loyalty is basic to her character.

The last female protagonist, Tía Tona, is not presented until Chapter II, which consists entirely of a flashback to Tona's earlier years. Blasco first describes her awaiting her husband "siempre con un arrapiezo al pecho y otro más talludo y gordiflón agarrado a sus faldas."<sup>31</sup> Here emphasis is placed upon the maternal aspect of Tona, pictured with her two small sons (who later become the principal male protagonists). The role of Tona as a mother is of major significance to the future development of her characterization.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 399.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 408.

As the plot unfolds the author supplies us with many more details about each of the four women characters, nevertheless our first impressions of them remain almost unchanged.

Another constant throughout the novel is Blasco's use of naturalism. Before proceeding with our analysis of specific examples of the naturalistic elements in Flor de Mayo, we must digress in order to explain our definition of naturalism. Essentially, naturalism is "literature with scientific pretensions."<sup>32</sup> Emile Zola, its major exponent, popularized the movement in France during the second half of the nineteenth century. His series of twenty novels entitled Les Rougon-Macquart, histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire stands as the foremost monument of naturalism.<sup>33</sup> Inspired by the writings of Charles Darwin, Hippolyte Taine, and Claude Bernard,<sup>34</sup> Zola formulated a scientific approach to literature, which is expounded in his work Le roman experimental (1880). According to

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<sup>32</sup>Ramon Guthrie and George E. Diller, French Literature and Thought Since the Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942), p. 338.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 404.

<sup>34</sup>Specifically, Zola was inspired by certain works of these authors: Darwin's On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life, usually referred to simply as Origin of Species (1859); Taine's Histoire de la litterature anglaise (1863); and Bernard's Introduction à l'étude de la medecine experimentale (1865).

Zola, naturalism consists of two basic principles: determinism and emphasis on the sordid aspects of life. The doctrine of determinism states that man's actions are not chosen freely but are determined by a sequence of causes, in particular, his heredity, his environment, and his historical epoch. The secondary factor of naturalism, the exacting details, especially those which evoke repulsive images, further accentuates man's hopeless situation.

Blasco Ibañez, although considered by many to be the "Spanish Zola," does not adhere to all of the Zolaesque principles. Instead Blasco stresses primarily the importance of the environment, with heredity and historical elements having only minor influences. However he does exhibit a talent for detailed observations, and on many occasions, his descriptions are indeed ugly and sordid. Usually, he employs such repulsive details to highlight the cruelty and power of the environment.

An excellent example of his emphasis on the environment can be found in his novel, Flor de Mayo, in which he includes numerous descriptions of the primitive surroundings of El Cabañal and of the crude, instinctual people who live there. Through the use of these photographic details, the credibility of the fishermen's environment and their miserable predicament are strengthened. Man is in constant

struggle with his hostile environment which seems to overwhelm him and influence his every action. Thus the general tone of the novel is fatalistic and the death of the two male protagonists comes as no surprise.

Although heredity is also an important element of naturalism, it is not a major factor in Flor de Mayo. The only references to inherited traits are made by Tía Tona, who believes that Roseta's and El Retor's personalities are directly attributable to their respective fathers.

Most characters in naturalistic novels lack psychological development and this is also true in Flor de Mayo. Blasco does not provide his women characters with opportunities to significantly broaden and deepen their personalities. In any event, there are a few examples of introspection when, for instance, Rosario doubts whether her confession to El Retor is justified, when Tona renews her sense of independence after she is abandoned by her lover and when Dolores constantly schemes to better her social and economic position. Yet these instances are rare and as we mentioned earlier in this study, the author's initial presentation of each character usually gives us an adequate insight into his or her disposition.

Despite the sometimes shallow psychological presentation of the women characters, Blasco makes them believable through the use of dialogues, colloquialisms, and



the native Valencian dialect.<sup>35</sup> Also the characters' speech exemplifies their vulgarity and lack of education. Much of the language used by the female characters is not acceptable for ladies, but it is indeed appropriate for fisherwomen, and, in fact, further highlights their coarseness.

Our discussion thus far has been limited to the credibility of the four female characters, using as our frame of reference their depiction within the novel Flor de Mayo. We will now analyze them, not only as fictional characters, but also as representatives of the era in which they lived. By comparing them with nineteenth-century Spanish women in general, we will discover that there are aspects of their characterizations which are contrary to the factual circumstances of women of that period.

Illicit love affairs, for example, were common among Spanish fisherwomen at that time.<sup>36</sup> Yet the two women characters (Tona and Dolores) who have lovers in Flor de Mayo are punished for their unfaithfulness. Tona, in addition to being left with Roseta as a constant reminder

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<sup>35</sup>In general the use of the Valencian dialect is more common in Blasco's lower class characters, such as those found in Flor de Mayo.

<sup>36</sup>Pedro Gómez Martí studies the problems of infidelity among fisherwomen in nineteenth-century Spain in his work, Psicología del pueblo valenciano según las novelas de Blasco Ibañez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1932), p. 185.

of her affair, has to bear the tragic death of her two sons and her grandson. Dolores loses both her husband and her lover in the shipwreck and then must view the mutilated body of her dead child.

Furthermore the feminine characters in Flor de Mayo share with their male counterparts the harsh working conditions. This is a practice which was uncommon for most nineteenth-century Spanish women. Also atypical are the aggressiveness and the self-sufficient attitudes of Dolores, Tía Tona, and Tía Picores.

On a broader plane, however, we can analyze the four major women characters of Flor de Mayo and find aspects of their personalities which are typical of nineteenth-century Spain and indeed are universal. Particularly Dolores' pride and ambition, Rosario's covetousness, Tía Tona's resentment, and Tía Picores' impudence are common emotions which, so masterfully dealt with by Blasco, enable us to empathize with their problems in spite of vast differences in environment and historical setting.

## CHAPTER III

### DOMINEERING, MATERIALISTIC WIDOWS

In many of Blasco's Valencian novels women who are introduced as widows or who are widowed during the course of the plot play significant roles. We will focus our attention in this chapter on three of these women characters in particular: doña Manuela of Arroz y tartana, doña Bernarda of Entre naranjos, and Neleta of Cañas y barro. Although each of these characters is distinct in personality and characterization, they can nevertheless be compared and analyzed.

The author portrays them as egotistical, selfish individuals whose principal preoccupation is maintaining their enviable social and economic positions in their communities. Consequently, their personal obligations and moral standards become mere secondary concerns. This distorted sense of values is especially evident in their relationships with their husbands and children.

We will analyze doña Manuela, doña Bernarda, and Neleta separately, first discussing the backgrounds of each of the novels in which these characters appear and then relating the circumstances and surroundings in the novel to the characters' development. A detailed study of each

of the female characters follows in which we explain the reasons for considering them as major characters. After discussing the women characters individually, we will summarize specific qualities which all three possess in common, particularly those qualities that make them "domineering, materialistic widows."

#### Doña Manuela - Arroz y tartana

In Arroz y tartana (1894) Blasco gives an exacting account of the social and economic history of the Valencia in which he spent his youth. Many of the details are indeed reminiscent of Blasco's personal experiences, such as the fact that his parents were shopkeepers, as are the protagonists of Arroz y tartana. Because of his exposure to the Valencian middle class at that time, the author is able to depict their problems realistically. Their major frustration, in many cases, was trying to emulate the customs of upper class society, often at any cost. This situation is emphasized in the title of the novel Arroz y tartana:

Ya el título es bien valenciano, pues constituye el primer verso de una copla popular que significa "querer y no poder," deslumbrar a la gente con discursos, modales y lujo no basados

en la realidad. Poseer una tartana para no ir a pie, aunque el mantener ese lujo represente tener que comer sólo arroz en el secreto de la casa . . . "1

Almost all of the characters in Arroz y tartana fit into the category of pseudo-sophisticated bourgeoisie.

Some of the characters are affluent enough to imitate, at least materially, the customs of the aristocrats, while others, such as the protagonist doña Manuela, do so at great expense to their physical and moral well-being. Herein lies the basis of the narrative--the common practice of "querer y no poder."<sup>2</sup> Thus the characterization of doña Manuela depicts many of the social mores typical of the times.

It should also be noted that doña Manuela's actions affect all of the major characters in Arroz y tartana: "En esta novela ella es eje alrededor del cual giran todos los demás caracteres. Los hombres eran adúlteros a causa de ella; éstos y otras mujeres eran avaros por ella y sus hijos se degeneraban debido a ella, . . . "3 Doña Manuela is certainly the most influential character, male or female, in Arroz y

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<sup>1</sup>Emilio Gascó Contell, Blasco Ibañez: genio y figura (Madrid: Afrodisio Aguado, S.A., 1967), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>Translated literally into English, "querer y no poder" means "to want and not to be able to," suggesting that many individuals try to appear wealthy and sophisticated while, in reality, they are poor and pretentious.

<sup>3</sup>George Allen Gerrard, "Significación social de los tipos en las novelas valencianas de Vicente Blasco Ibañez" (unpublished M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1952), p. 88.

tartana. Her importance in the novel is further highlighted by the care the author takes in presenting a thorough, almost photographic, description of her. Through the many details about her physical being, we can visualize her beautiful face with "mejillas de melocotón" and eyes like "ardientes ascuas."<sup>4</sup> Her innate femininity is also enhanced by her use of fancy clothes and cosmetics, to the extent that even in her later years doña Manuela remains a physically attractive woman.<sup>5</sup>

Her personality, though, detracts from her pleasant appearance, for she is usually regarded as a vain, haughty, arrogant individual. In many aspects, doña Manuela's egocentricity can be traced to her childhood experience of being spoiled by her parents. Her father once described her as " . . . una hija que ignoraba el valor del dinero y gastaba mucho en trajes, . . . "<sup>6</sup> Because of her background Manuela developed a distorted view of society:

Para ella, la sociedad estaba dividida  
en dos castas: los que van a pie  
y los que gastan carruaje; los que

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<sup>4</sup>Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I (7th edition; Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 278.

<sup>5</sup>It is also interesting to note that on p. 278 of Obras completas, doña Manuela, because of her fine facial features, is compared to the beautiful heroines in Romantic novels. Moreover, this image of her as a Romantic figure helps her first husband Melchor to accept her frivolous, irresponsible nature.

<sup>6</sup>Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 279.

tienen en su casa gran patio  
 con ancho portalón y los que entran  
 por estrecha escalerilla o por  
 oscura trastienda.<sup>7</sup>

Doña Manuela adheres to this shallow belief throughout her life, regardless of the hardships she and her family must endure to maintain their prominence in the community.

One of the persons most affected by doña Manuela's continuing struggle for social recognition is her first husband Melchor. She marries him despite his lack of sophistication because she sees in him an industrious, ambitious businessman who will be able to make enough money to satisfy her every whim. And yet after a short while his vulgarity becomes intolerable. Manuela feels as if his mannerisms, dress, habits, and lack of cultural interests make it apparent to everyone that he is a commoner. She therefore tries to change him by encouraging him to dress differently, to attend social gatherings, and in general to act in a sophisticated manner. "¡Pobre don Melchor! La riqueza purgábala como un delito, y su vida de rentista ocioso y de acompañante en paseos y ceremonias resultábale un infierno."<sup>8</sup> Don Eugenio, a fellow businessman who shares with Melchor a disdain for the customs of the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

nouveau riche, warns Melchor that Manuela's attempt to make him conform to her extravagant and socially oriented lifestyle will eventually lead to his early death: "Ella te ha de matar, y ya estás en camino. Tú no puedes tirar con una vida así . . . Jaula nueva, pájaro muerto."<sup>9</sup> Don Eugenio's prediction proves to be accurate, for shortly afterward Melchor dies and his doctors cannot determine the exact cause of his death. Although doña Manuela never actually loved Melchor in their seven years of marriage, she plays the part of the distraught widow at his funeral. Her tears, however, are more for the loss of a good provider than for a husband and companion.

Doña Manuela dismisses the fact that her second husband, Rafael, is fun-loving and irresponsible, and she marries him because she feels that she loves him, or at least is attracted to his carefree outlook on life. We discover that she even sacrifices her honor to gain him; their daughter Conchita is born only three months after they are married. The infatuated Manuela does almost anything to keep Rafael contented, even to the extent that for a short while she economizes so that Rafael can continue his own wasteful spending. But she finally becomes so disgusted with

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 281.



his drinking and carousing that she abandons him. Later, when she learns that he has died because of his intemperance, she shows little remorse. Manuela, then, becomes a widow for the second time. But, unlike her first husband, who left her financially secure, Rafael leaves her almost destitute.

Before proceeding with our present discussion, we must digress for a moment in order to comment on the limited number of socially accepted options available to prominent women who found themselves in a financial situation similar to Manuela's. The logical solution--to get a job--was not acceptable in nineteenth-century Spain. A brief excerpt from Women of All Nations, a noted sociological work written at that time, explains the Spanish woman's predicament:

That a woman of gentle birth should make the least effort to earn a penny is considered quite out of the question. She may be as poor as she likes and still retain her social standing, but let her grow weary of existing on a miserable pittance, and use her brain and energy to increase her income, and she will lose caste at once. Inconceivable as it may appear, the Spaniard considers it preferable for intelligent and able-bodied women to live upon the charity of relatives or friends rather than they should endeavor to provide for themselves even by intellectual or artistic pursuits.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>T. Athol Joyce and N.W. Thomas, Women of All Nations, Vol. II (New York: Cassell and Co., Limited, 1909), p. 720.

Since a woman was not allowed to help herself financially by working, her only alternatives were either to rely on relatives or to find a wealthy lover.

Taking these observations into consideration, we find that doña Manuela chooses to have an affair with the affluent Antonio Cuadros, with the hope that their relationship will remain secret. To begin an affair with Antonio is one of Manuela's most difficult decisions. She had already lost her honor, in a sense, by having pre-marital sexual relations with Rafael. But being intimate with a crude, uncultured person such as Antonio, and knowing that he is married to one of her former servants, really disgusts Manuela:

" . . . ahora se trataba de una explotación deshonorosa, de una venta que sólo el suponerla le producía vergüenza y rubor."<sup>11</sup> To add to her sorry plight, the financial support from Antonio is short-lived. Soon after they begin seeing one another he loses most of his money in the stock market and leaves town with his wife and family without the least concern for Manuela's problems. Manuela's hope for economic recovery is now shattered. And equally devastating is the realization that because of her scandalous affair with Antonio she has disgraced herself and her family forever.

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<sup>11</sup>Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 366.

Doña Manuela's family, in fact, has always suffered from her irresponsible actions. Since she concentrates all her efforts on continuing her pretentious lifestyle, she has little time to devote to the needs of her four children, Rafaelito, Juanito, Conchita, and Amparito.

Her sole concern for her daughters is that they marry respectable gentlemen so that their marriages will reflect favorably on their family, and indirectly will better Manuela's social position. With such a mother for an example, it is not surprising that both of her daughters become frivolous, insincere women.

Although doña Manuela is a bad influence on her daughters, her effect on her two sons is even more devastating. First of all, she shows partiality to Rafaelito, the son of her second husband. He, like his father, is irresponsible and undependable; nevertheless she overlooks his faults and gives him whatever he wants. On the other hand she ignores her other son, Juanito, who has inherited his father's (Melchor's) physical appearance, his skill in the business world, and his loyalty to the undeserving Manuela. Because of his affection for her, she is able to use him and his money easily as she had done with his father. He continues to lend her money until he finds out about her affair with Antonio. The discovery of their illicit relationship leaves Juanito in such a state of shock that it is believed to have caused his death. Thus both he

and his father die at an early age, due mainly to their disenchantment with their beloved Manuela.

After Juanito's death, doña Manuela begins to feel guilty about neglecting her maternal duties and about showing partiality towards her children. But it is too late. Her brother Juan warns her that she will be punished for ignoring her obligations as a mother, especially for her treatment of her son Juanito.

Vivirás intranquila. Hasta ahora, el pobre Juanito apenas si ha merecido tu atención; pero la muerte despertará en ti los instintos de madre, pensarás en él a todas horas, le verás en sueños, y la sospecha de que tu hijo pudo conocerte tal como eres amargará tu existencia . . .<sup>12</sup>

Juanito also hurts her deeply by refusing, on his deathbed, to accept her apology or even to see her.

It is equally agonizing for Manuela to contemplate the future of her other three children, who, because of her influence, are becoming dependent, indolent failures. Likewise, through her insincerity and hypocrisy, she ruins her relationship with her only two acquaintances, Teresa and Clarita. At the end of the novel, doña Manuela is left with only one hope for the future, her brother Juan. Feeling sorry for his young nieces, Juan agrees to help them, but only on his terms. For the first time in her life, Manuela will be forced to live according to her means.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

Manuela has always placed her own selfish concerns above those of her family and friends, and as we discover at the end, she is made to pay for her neglect. Because of her egotistical preoccupations, Manuela had considered her responsibilities as a wife, lover, mother, and friend as secondary. For this reason, we do not see her in any one dominant role in the novel. She is, in effect, a static character whose selfish nature persists until the very end where she is forced to change in order to survive.

The characterization of doña Manuela may at times appear extremely one-sided because Blasco tends to highlight only those qualities which are unfavorable. Like Dolores of Flor de Mayo, doña Manuela's only outstanding feature is her physical attractiveness. Moreover she shares with Dolores the ability to dominate the lives of those who surround her, especially her family and friends.

In spite of her sometimes absurd behavior, the characterization of doña Manuela is for the most part believable. Her snobbish, pompous attitudes in many respects reflect the materialistic society in which she lives. A great number of those who succeed in becoming part of the nouveaux riches try to use their money to gain social recognition. Doña Manuela's ostentation and extravagance are indeed an integral part of the bourgeoisie's struggle for acceptance into the upper circles of society.

Also her bankruptcy at the end of the novel is a common occurrence at that time. In the nineteenth century, many Spaniards and other Europeans, as well, left home and family in hopes of becoming wealthy in the silk industry in Valencia. This fact prompted Pedro Gómez Martí to compare the financial decline of doña Manuela with the Valencian industries' gradual decrease in importance.

Comercio e industria venían a morir  
 en la burguesía, pues ha de tenerse  
 en cuenta que doña Manuela representaba  
 a la industria de la seda, cuya muerte  
 se iba fraguando por aquella época.  
 La historia de la industria sedera es la  
 de tantas otras industrias valencianas.  
 Ella únicamente tiene representación  
 en las novelas de Blasco Ibañez, y a  
 fe que puede ser tipo de las demás.<sup>13</sup>

This analogy adds yet another dimension to doña Manuela's already complex characterization.

One of the factors that makes doña Manuela such an outstanding figure in the novel is the author's use of other characters as direct contrasts to her. For example, don José, the industrious merchant, helps to accentuate doña Manuela's lack of initiative, while Juan, her miserly brother, highlights her prodigality. And her son Juanito's devotion to her contrasts with her lack of sensitivity to his feelings. Even Manuela's beauty can be contrasted with Antonio's wife's homeliness.

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<sup>13</sup>Pedro Gómez Martí, Psicología del pueblo valenciano según las novelas de Blasco Ibañez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1932), p. 145.

There are, however, other characters who are similar in disposition to Manuela, such as Conchita, Amparito, and Clarita. These characters help to reinforce the idea that Manuela's behavior is not unusual for Spanish middle class women at the turn of the century.

Doña Manuela, like a considerable number of bourgeoisie at that time, wastes her entire life trying to gain social prominence. At the close of Arroz y tartana she realizes that her priorities will have to change drastically; never again will she be able to afford expensive dresses and lavish parties. But, most important, throughout the novel Manuela's primary concern is for the semblance of honor and dignity--by the end of the novel she has neither.

#### Doña Bernarda - Entre naranjos

Entre naranjos (1900) is one of Blasco's most popular novels, as evidenced by the fact that by 1922 more than fifty thousand copies had been sold. As in his other Valencian works, the author uses first-hand knowledge and personal experiences to add authenticity to the story. Also, as the title indicates, part of the enjoyment that comes from reading Entre naranjos

is derived from the numerous picturesque descriptions of nature that are found in the narrative. Blasco uses a paradisiacal landscape in which to set the major portion of the novel--the beautiful orange grove region of Alcira in the Huerta, south of the Albufera and Valencia. Grove A. Day and Edgar C. Knowlton in their work, V. Blasco Ibañez, explain the author's association with this particular area.

This region [Alcira] was quite familiar to Blasco, who made frequent electoral excursions to such provincial places and observed the narrow conventionality of the orange barons . . . He used not only the beauties and economics of the rich Huerta, but also the routines and boredom of his service in the National Congress, of which he had been a member for two years.<sup>14</sup>

There are critics who believe that many episodes in Entre naranjos are at least partially autobiographical. For example, they contend that the character of Leonora is fashioned after a Russian opera singer named Vercher with whom Blasco once had a love affair.<sup>15</sup> Also a parallel can be seen between Blasco's admiration for the composer Richard Wagner and the similarity between Leonora of

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<sup>14</sup>Grove A. Day and Edgar C. Knowlton, Jr., V. Blasco Ibañez (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 57.

<sup>15</sup>Joaquín Entrambasaguas, Las mejores novelas contemporáneas, Vol. II (Barcelona: Planeta, 1958), p. 65.



Entre naranjos and the female protagonist of Wagner's Die Walküre (1856).<sup>16</sup> And yet still another critic, Andrenio, one of Blasco's contemporaries, comments that the political situations, and even some of the politicians in Entre naranjos, resemble those that Blasco encountered in his many years in government service.

La misma política que, entreveradamente con la acción se sigue paso a paso en la novela, con gráficas escenas y sanas repulsas--todo hay que decirlo--delata la experiencia temible del autor, metido por entonces en andanzas semejantes, sin que sea posible identificar alusiones y elementos concretos aunque se sospechan muy fundadamente. Sus ideas políticas, sin nada que pueda herir a sus contrarios, se exponen con mucho idealismo y poca verdad por el viejecito diputado a quien ha de responder Rafael en el que Blasco quiso simbolizar a Pi y Margall, su jefe político, al que siguió con más o menos fidelidad.<sup>17</sup>

Just as the autobiographical elements of Entre naranjos are worthy of note, so are the many diverse classifications that have been given to the novel. For example, some critics believe that Entre naranjos is basically a love story. This theory has some validity since the original title of the work was Amor que pasa, and since

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<sup>16</sup>Emiliano Diez-Echarri and José María Roca Franquesa, Historia de la literatura española e hispanoamericana (Madrid: Aguilar, 1968), p. 1116.

<sup>17</sup>Entrambasaguas, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

a great majority of the plot deals with the love affair between Rafael and Leonora.<sup>18</sup> Still others consider the novel to be regionalistic and naturalistic because of the use of various local customs and the importance of the environment's affect on the characters.<sup>19</sup> This point of view is also accurate, for both naturalistic and regionalistic passages can be found in the work.<sup>20</sup> Some critics, though, disagree because they feel that the environment is not treated in a naturalistic manner, but in a poetic manner. For this reason, they evaluate the work as essentially a

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<sup>18</sup>Both Camille Pitollet and Andrenio contend that Entre naranjos is primarily a passionate love story. Camille Pitollet, V. Blasco Ibáñez. Sus novelas y la novela de su vida, trans. by Tulio Moncada (Valencia: Prometeo, 1922), p. 221. Andrenio, as quoted by Joaquín Entrambasaguas, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

<sup>19</sup>The use of regionalism in Entre naranjos is of particular interest to León Roca and L. Schepelevich. J.L. León Roca, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1967), p. 237. L. Schepelevich, "Novelistas españoles contemporáneos: Vicente Blasco Ibáñez," La lectura (1904), p. 349.

Grove A. Day comments about the importance of heredity and environment on the protagonists of Entre naranjos. Day, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>20</sup>An especially graphic example of regionalism can be found in the scene describing the peasants' religious procession, which eventually leads to their carrying the statue of San Bernardo into the rising river in hopes of stopping the torrential rains. (Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I, pp. 596-599).

Specific references to the naturalistic elements in Entre naranjos will be discussed later in the conclusion of chapter III of this present study.

poetic novel.<sup>21</sup> And yet Paul Manchester stresses the psychological aspect of the work by defining the plot as " . . . the psychological reaction of the bourgeoisie to sophistication and free love."<sup>22</sup> If we consider Entre naranjos as a forerunner to Blasco's psychological novels, then Manchester's opinion can readily be substantiated.<sup>23</sup>

Having completed a brief, overall introduction to the background of Entre naranjos, we will now proceed with the major theme of our work, that is, the importance of the women characters in the novel.

For the most part, the female as compared to the male characters in Entre naranjos are portrayed as the stronger, more authoritative individuals, particularly doña Bernarda and Leonora. Unlike most of the other characters whom we have discussed, doña Bernarda's physical appearance is difficult to define, due to a lack of specific details. Instead Blasco concentrates on describing the many facets of her personality, which are displayed in the various roles that she plays in the narrative. At

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<sup>21</sup>Joaquín Entrambasaguas comments about the novel's elegant style with its lyrical and poetic qualities. (Entrambasaguas, op. cit., p. 71).

<sup>22</sup>Paul Manchester, "Introduction" to La barraca (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946), p. xiii.

<sup>23</sup>In the introduction (p. 3) to this study, we also refer to psychological elements in Entre naranjos. We comment that Leonora is excluded from our discussion because "her characterization is more closely associated with those in Blasco's later psychological and cosmopolitan novels."

different times, we see her as a submissive wife, a stern mother, a political leader, and a devout, if not fanatical, Catholic. She is an austere, industrious individual who remains adamant in her convictions, namely her religious beliefs and her political conservatism.

On the other hand, if we examine doña Bernarda's position as a wife, she appears to have a completely opposite disposition from that of an authoritative woman. She is already a widow when the novel begins; her relationship with her husband Ramón is presented through a series of flashbacks. It is important to note that her marriage to Ramón was arranged by his father who wanted his son to marry her because she was the daughter of a wealthy landowner. Their marriage, then, is based on money rather than on love. And we discover later that she and Ramón place affluence and prestige above their personal relationship. She is content with allowing him to squander money carelessly, to have love affairs with other women, and in general to ignore her completely. In the meantime she remains faithful and occupies herself with managing their business. Her ultimate aim, however, is to become head of the household. When Ramón dies from his overindulgence in liquor and women, doña Bernarda displays no remorse; in fact, she has even prayed for his death. Bernarda finally shows her

true character, that of a determined and domineering individual, by admitting after her husband's death: "Ahora se vería de lo que era capaz una mujer."<sup>24</sup>

After Ramón's death, doña Bernarda devotes most of her energy to planning her son's future. Still she does find time to increase the profit margin of her orange business, thereby expanding her power and influence in the community. Because of her busy schedule, she has neither the time nor the desire to marry again or to have illicit love affairs.

Nevertheless her unique relationship with don Andrés, a long time friend of the family, should be mentioned. Especially after Ramón's death, don Andrés becomes Bernarda's confidant, listening to her problems and offering her sympathy and advice. Blasco describes their relationship: "Era un afecto semejante al de las antiguas damas por el escudero de confianza."<sup>25</sup> The situation is intensified by the fact that he refers to her as "ama" or "señora maestra." Although she values his companionship, she lets no one, not even don Andrés, interfere with her primary concern--her son Rafael.

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<sup>24</sup>Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 577.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 574.

Doña Bernarda feels that since she is Rafael's mother, she has the right, or more than that, the obligation to make all of his decisions, including his choice of career, friends, girlfriends, and ultimately his wife. This sternness, coupled with her possessiveness, makes her power over him absolute.

Her greatest ambition is to have Rafael become a respected politician because through his success she will be able to enhance her prestige and power. Following his mother's advice, Rafael does indeed enter law school, and eventually become an esteemed political figure.

Also, yielding to pressure from doña Bernarda, Rafael stops seeing Leonora, whom he loves, and marries his mother's favorite, Remedios, the daughter of a wealthy merchant.

It may seem at times that the character of doña Bernarda, particularly with regard to her control over her son, is exaggerated. Many mothers, though, especially Spanish mothers, play a significant part in directing their son's lives: ". . . for most Spaniards the family complex is never broken, and the woman rules in the heart and the unconscious not of her husband but of her son."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Langdon-Davies, "The Spanish Woman," Harper's Monthly Magazine, CLIX (1929), p. 716.

But this fact serves only as a secondary influence on Blasco's characterization of doña Bernarda, for Grove A. Day contends that the principal inspiration may have been his own mother, doña Ramona.

She [doña Ramona], so energetic and brisk, from whom surely Blasco drew the greater part of his genius, often showed that she was inflexible and abrupt with this son so little submissive to her wishes in matters of discipline, of rigor in duty, and of religious piety.<sup>27</sup>

We have found other aspects of doña Bernarda's character that are similar to doña Ramona, such as her profound religious convictions, her insistence that her son become a lawyer, and her constant struggle to improve her family's social standing.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of these similarities, there are differences between the two women. For example, doña Bernarda, unlike doña Ramona, is a powerful political figure in her community and the leader of the local conservative party. Through this association she meets many acquaintances, but no true friends. Her daughter-in-law Remedios (who in many respects resembles doña Bernarda) continues to be her closest friend.

Since doña Bernarda's influence over her son is essential to the development of the plot, it is to be

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<sup>27</sup>Day, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>28</sup>Although other works are consulted, our primary source of information about Blasco's mother is Pilar Tortosa, Tres mujeres en la vida y la obra de Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1972), pp. 11-68.

expected that her role as a mother is her most important function in the novel. Blasco rarely deviates from his portrayal of doña Bernarda as domineering and ambitious, to the extent that her maternal concerns, her religious fervor, and her political conservatism border at times on fanaticism. He concentrates solely on her detrimental features, distorting those qualities that, if not carried to an extreme, could be considered favorable.

The characterization of doña Bernarda, perhaps not as important as that of Leonora and Rafael, is certainly noteworthy because doña Bernarda interacts with, and subsequently influences, almost all of the characters in Entre naranjos. Besides, she is an excellent example of Blasco's strong-willed, determined female characters who usually succeed in acquiring whatever they want.

In the case of doña Bernarda, however, her aim throughout the novel is to have her son regain the family's prestige, wealth, and power that her husband had lost. Ostensibly she succeeds, since Rafael does become a prominent politician. Yet, in the end, he becomes very much like his father--a corrupt congressman and an unfaithful husband. Doña Bernarda's good intentions ironically result in failure, which she cannot accept. At the end of the novel, she escapes to religious fanaticism and spends most of her time praying in church.



### Neleta - Cañas y barro

The last of Blasco's Valencian novels, Cañas y barro (1902), is the only one that was not presented in serial form in the newspaper El Pueblo. But this fact does not imply that the author deliberated more while writing Cañas y barro, for it was written as rapidly as, if not more rapidly than, most of his other novels.

Componía "en mente" sus libros, llevándolos muchas veces meses enteros en la cabeza, pero cuando se resolvía a escribirlos le acometía una verdadera fiebre, un ansia de terminar de una vez que le acicateaba constantemente, obligándole a escribir con ininterrumpida precipitación. El mismo refería que a fin de acabar Cañas y barro estuvo escribiendo treinta y cuatro horas seguidas, para caer enfermo apenas trazada la frase final del libro.<sup>29</sup>

But it is evident that quality was not sacrificed, for Cañas y barro has been considered one of the best of the Valencian novels. Blasco himself admits that Cañas y barro was his favorite novel, the one that he composed with the most solidity, and the one that was the most well-rounded.<sup>30</sup> Most critics

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<sup>29</sup>"Vicente Blasco Ibáñez," Hispania, XI (May, 1928), p. 229.

<sup>30</sup>Sherman H. Eoff, The Modern Spanish Novel (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 116.

agree with Blasco's opinion of the work. "En Cañas y barro (1902), corona el autor la cumbre de su arte."<sup>31</sup> "There is a unity and colour in the book that make it, with La barraca, one of the most aesthetically satisfying novels of the century."<sup>32</sup>

The setting of the novel is the Albufera, specifically in El Palmar, a small, poor village surrounded by cañas y barro (reeds and mud). The author gives us a detailed account of the inhabitants of the Albufera, who are geographically close to Valencia, but socially and economically distant.

Similar to the rest of the Valencian novels, portions of Cañas y barro relate directly to personal recollections of the author. The difference is that in the other novels Blasco draws from various, sometimes unrelated, experiences. In Cañas y barro he uses only those experiences gained on a trip that he made to the Albufera in the spring of 1902, specifically for the purpose of writing a novel about that region. While in the Albufera he familiarized himself with the local people, talking with them, studying their customs, and even visiting

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<sup>31</sup>José A. Balseiro, Blasco Ibañez, Unamuno, Valle-Inclán, Baroja: Cuatro individualistas de España (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 10.

<sup>32</sup>Gerald Brenan, The Literature of the Spanish People (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 414.

their homes. From these impressions Blasco creates some of the most memorable characters in the Valencian works.

While there are very few female characters in Cañas y barro, Neleta is the major protagonist, and the only important woman. Our attention therefore is focused almost exclusively on Neleta's personality and her interaction with the other characters, especially the male characters. For this reason, we feel that Neleta is one of Blasco's most powerfully portrayed female figures, a belief which is generally accepted by most critics.<sup>33</sup>

Although there are scant details about her physical appearance at first, the author, from the very beginning of the novel, implies that she is attractive. Then, little by little, we are given a full description of her: she is a petite redhead, with smooth skin and exceptionally beautiful green eyes. Moreover she enhances her femininity by adorning her hair with fresh flowers and by using aromatic herbs as perfume.

Consequently Neleta's delicate appearance does not seem to conform to her forceful character. But we soon discover that she is a selfish opportunist who does

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<sup>33</sup>According to James O. Swain, Neleta is the strongest female character in the Valencian novels.

James O. Swain, "The Albufera Thirty Years After. Memories of Cañas y barro," Hispania (1935), p. 34.

not allow anything or anyone to interfere with her ambition of achieving social and economic prominence.

Blasco further highlights her callousness by comparing her with the legendary serpent, Sancha. According to folklore, Sancha and a young shepherd boy are close friends until the boy has to leave town to become a soldier. After many years, he returns home from the war, and Sancha squeezes him so fondly that she strangles him to death. Like Sancha, Neleta destroys those who love her.<sup>34</sup>

Neleta's relationship with her sickly yet wealthy husband Cañamel is proof of her destructive power. She convinces this gullible old smuggler and tavern owner (who usually scorns women publicly) that she loves him. He finds himself incapable of resisting " . . . el contacto de aquella criatura maliciosa que le rozaba con gracia felina,"<sup>35</sup> even though the doctor advises him that sexual activity will be a detriment to his unstable condition. The love that Neleta feels is not for Cañamel, but for his money. In any event, they marry, and Neleta remains a

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<sup>34</sup>It is noteworthy that the story of Sancha and her little shepherd friend resembles in many respects the relationship between Neleta and Tonet. They have been lovers ever since they were adolescents. Then Tonet has to leave town to fight in the war. Upon his return, he and Neleta renew their amorous relationship, which in the end results in Tonet's death.

<sup>35</sup>Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 850.

faithful and at times even a devoted wife, especially when Cañamel becomes gravely ill. She pretends to be the exemplary wife, although her sole purpose is to gain Cañamel's confidence and ultimately his fortune. She is successful in her endeavor, for when Cañamel dies, he leaves her everything. The only stipulation is that if she remarries or takes a lover, she must forfeit her inheritance.

Although Neleta marries Cañamel only because of his wealth, she does nothing to hurt him personally. In fact she shows him affection, cares for him, and even pampers him when he is ill. Consequently, when he dies she is not sorrowful, for she feels as if they both had obtained what they wanted from their marriage: he, a loving wife and she, his money.

On the contrary, Neleta, the widow, is a different person. She completely ignores the needs of others while concentrating on becoming a prosperous businesswoman. Just as doña Bernarda does in Entre naranjos, Neleta displays her true personality only after her husband's death. Through Blasco's description of her as the new proprietor of Cañamel's tavern, we can note very clearly the change in her attitudes.

Neleta, vestida de luto, estaba tras el mostrador, embellecida por cierto aire de autoridad. Parecía más grande al verse rica y libre. Bromeaba menos con los parroquianos; mostrábase de una virtud arisca; acogía con torno ceño y

apretando los labios las bromas a que estaban habituados los concurrentes, y bastaba que algún bebedor rozase al tomar el vaso sus brazos remangados para que Neleta sacase las uñas, amenazando con plantarle en la puerta.<sup>36</sup>

The customers in her tavern are not the only ones who are mistreated, for she abuses her lover Tonet probably more than anyone else.

Neleta's inconstant childhood sweetheart, Tonet, becomes her faithful lover upon his return home from the war. By that time, though, she has already married Cañamel. This period is one of contentment for Neleta because she enjoys the company of both a rich husband and a passionate lover. After Cañamel's death, Neleta and Tonet continue their affair, because she refuses to marry him for fear of losing her inheritance. Her financial welfare proves to be her most important concern. This fact becomes particularly evident when Neleta discovers that she is pregnant. Although she had wanted to have a baby by Cañamel, she now tries to abort Tonet's baby by pounding her stomach, taking potions, and praying for the baby's death. Blasco describes at length the various methods employed by Neleta in her unsuccessful attempt to kill her unborn child.<sup>37</sup> These passages, some of which are

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 896.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., pp. 899-903.

rather harsh, emphasize Neleta's heartlessness and determination. And yet they cannot even begin to compare with the tragic manner in which she has Tonet dispose of the child once it is born. He fails to follow her more humane plan of leaving the baby on a doorstep in Valencia, and instead throws the infant into the high reeds. Later, on a hunting trip, his dog accidentally retrieves the mutilated corpse.

Tonet's painful remembrance of his atrocious act ultimately leads to his suicide. When Neleta hears of his death, she appears to remain unmoved, for she is still worried that someone will find out about their affair and force her to forfeit her inheritance. When Tonet's grandfather, who was on the hunting trip with Tonet, promises to remain silent, Neleta is relieved. She is now assured of keeping her inheritance, which, above all else, is her main concern.

Just as she loses Tonet, the one man whom she loved, because of her excessive greed, she likewise loses her opportunity to be a mother. Always ready to sacrifice moral principle for financial success, Neleta's materialism supercedes her maternal instinct and she is responsible for a mother's worst crime--infanticide.

Since it is not likely that a person who neglects her lover and her child will display concern for anyone,

Neleta's lack of close friends is understandable. The women in the village are envious of her beauty and wealth and they tend to ignore her.

In all of her capacities as wife, lover, mother, and friend, Neleta exhibits little change in her feelings since she is always guided by avarice and "egoísmo férreo."<sup>38</sup> She considers her intimacy with others as secondary to her personal ambitions. Even in her relationship with Tonet, in which she obviously shows some affection, her actions are still dominated by greed. Blasco, in essence, never presents Neleta with any admirable qualities. He portrays her as an adulterous wife, an insensitive lover, and a ruthless mother.

Nevertheless Neleta is one of Blasco's most dynamic characters. Probably more than any other single character in the Valencian novels, the consequences of her ambition are drastically felt by those who surround her. This is evidenced by the fact that Neleta is indirectly responsible for the death of three individuals, Cañamel, Tonet, and her newborn child. Her dominant position in the novel is further emphasized by the contrasts which exist between Neleta and all the other principal characters. For example, both Cañamel and Tonet are weak characters who

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 923.



submit obediently to Neleta's strong will. Also, Neleta's beauty and egoism are contrasted with La Borda's shyness, homeliness and lack of aggressiveness. Although she secretly loves Tonet, La Borda never professes her love until after his death.

Despite the tragic ending of Cañas y barro with the shocking deaths of Tonet and his baby, Neleta's future is not shattered. She had worked and had eventually obtained everything she had longed for--independence, wealth, and social pre-eminence. Her personal feelings always remain secondary to achieving her goals. Thus the deaths of her husband, her lover, and her child, although traumatic experiences, will not significantly alter her plans for the future.

### Conclusions

Our remarks so far have been restricted to analyzing doña Manuela, doña Bernarda, and Neleta within the confines of the particular novels in which they are found. We will now consider the three women as individual characters and study the common characteristics which make them "domineering, materialistic widows." Their manner of presentation, their characterization, and the effect of naturalism on their lives will be the major factors discussed here.

Just as we pointed out in chapter II of this study that Blasco's introductions of his protagonists often present adequate insight into the characters' personalities, we also find this to be true of his initial presentations of doña Manuela, doña Bernarda, and Neleta. Our first impressions of these characters are usually accurate ones.

For example, Blasco offers a clue to doña Manuela's disposition in the first sentence of Arroz y tartana when he describes her entering the marketplace ". . . envuelto al airoso busto en un abrigo cuyos faldones casi llegaban al borde de la falda, cuidadosamente enguantada, con el limosnero al puño y velado el rostro por la tenue blonda de la mantilla."<sup>39</sup> Immediately, we envision doña Manuela as a sophisticated, aloof woman, meticulously dressed, who is, or purports to be, wealthy.

Likewise doña Bernarda's character becomes evident in the second paragraph of Entre naranjos, when the author describes her as having ". . . una mirada profunda escudriñadora de madre severa, . . ."<sup>40</sup> Doña Bernarda's role as a stern mother is indeed essential to the development of her characterization.

Unlike doña Manuela and doña Bernarda, who are presented in the first few sentences of the novels, Neleta

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 563.

is mentioned by other characters at the beginning of the narrative, but is not introduced until later. All the main characters in Cañas y barro are introduced in the first chapter as they arrive on a mail boat, and it is not until later that we find out how the families are related. In Blasco's first description of Neleta, he concentrates on her physical being, describing her extraordinary beauty, " . . . pequeña, con el rojo cabello alborotado, y ojos verdes y vivos que parecían acariciar con la suavidad del terciopelo."<sup>41</sup> Neleta's beauty is, in effect, her most important asset, because as a result of her attractiveness she is able to manipulate others more easily.

In the presentation of all three women, Blasco employs flashbacks to relate the events of their earlier years. Through these flashbacks the causes of the women's attitudes become evident.

Another factor which significantly affects the women's behavior is the author's use of naturalism. According to Blasco himself, his only Zolaesque novel is Arroz y tartana.<sup>42</sup> He held this opinion probably because

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 818.

<sup>42</sup>Camille Pitolllet, "Introduction" to Vicente Blasco Ibañez's Obras completas, Vol. I (7th edition; Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), p. 18.

of the exacting, often meticulous, details he employs in his description of the environment and of the characters, especially doña Manuela. He describes at length such seemingly insignificant things as her dress, her house, and her social gatherings. These descriptions, however, broaden our understanding of doña Manuela and of the historical era to which she belongs. The historical era, in fact, is of primary importance in Arroz y tartana because the effects of pragmatism and materialism on the middle class Spaniards in the nineteenth century were devastating. Through his characterization of Manuela, Blasco underlines the consequences of the common practice of living beyond one's means. In short, she represents all the undesirable features of the burgeoning bourgeoisie.

Entre naranjos, although a naturalistic novel, may, at first, appear to be other than naturalistic. There is an absence of sordid details and the environment rather than being cruel and harsh appears sensual and lyrical. But upon further examination one finds many factors which are typical of naturalism. For example, heredity plays an important part in the novel, as seen when doña Bernarda tells Rafael: "Lo mismo que tu padre! . . . No puedes negar su sangre; . . ." <sup>43</sup> Despite

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<sup>43</sup>Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. I, p. 610.

doña Bernarda's guidance, Rafael seems destined to follow in his father's footsteps. Also naturalistic is the scene in which Rafael, overwhelmed by the voluptuous quality of the beautiful orange groves, tries to force himself on Leonora. Influenced by the environment, his love becomes passionate and instinctual. Furthermore, Entre naranjos deals with a specific historical period, political conservatism in the affluent rural communities in Spain at the turn of the century. And, like doña Manuela in Arroz y tartana, doña Bernarda epitomizes the unfavorable qualities of that sector of Spanish society, in particular, provincialism, bigotry, and partisanship.

Although doña Manuela and doña Bernarda are influenced by their social and historical environment, Neleta is more affected by the harsh, often cruel, physical environment of the Albufera. In fact the environment in Cañas y barro becomes as important as the characters, with the Albufera at times becoming a character in itself. The photographic details and the crude realism found in this novel provide examples of naturalism at its sordid best. The rugged life of the inhabitants of the Albufera supercedes any note of the importance of the historical times. It is indeed the severity of the villagers' life which prompts Neleta to want to escape from squalor and privation. She will do almost anything to better her social and economic situation, as evidenced by her many inhumane actions.

From the beginning of each novel, the characters' dispositions are already well defined, leaving little room for development, another characteristic of naturalism. In contrast, a few incidents can be found in which the women characters display psychological introspection. For example, Neleta is concerned that her abandoned baby will be found by a wealthy family and doña Manuela is distressed because she has lost her honor through her affair with Antonio. In incidents such as these, the female characters appear almost repentant, but their egoism and pride soon overcome their momentary sense of guilt.

Another tenet of naturalism in all of the three novels discussed is the use of indirect, reported dialogue, a technique which Blasco favors, and one that he employs in most of his works.

In Arroz y tartana, Entre naranjos, and Cañas y barro, the language of the feminine characters is appropriate for their social and economic backgrounds, which is clearly one of Blasco's fortes. Doña Manuela, who wishes to appear elegant and cosmopolitan, uses numerous French and English words in her speech. In Entre naranjos, there is a sharp distinction between the proper language of doña Bernarda and the dialectal speech of the rustic peasants. Neleta of Cañas y barro like Dolores, Rosario, Tía Tona and Tía Picores of Flor de Mayo, represents the lower class woman, with

her speech habits reflecting that particular sector of society.

Although doña Manuela, doña Bernarda, and Neleta are protagonists of their respective novels, it is noteworthy that in each work the author also includes another female character who acts as a contrast. Teresa, Antonio's plain and modest wife, contrasts with doña Manuela, his attractive and pretentious lover, while Leonora's liberalism serves to accentuate doña Bernarda's conservatism. And there is a marked difference between Neleta's aggressiveness and La Borda's meekness. In each instance the women differ significantly in physical appearance, personality, and their ideas about love.

In spite of these contrasts, the three protagonists, considered apart from their novels exhibit many similarities, such as the fact that the husbands of all three women die from excessive drinking and carousing.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore doña Manuela and Neleta both have illicit love affairs, and both indirectly cause the death of other characters. Also they are all punished in some manner for their behavior. Doña Manuela, in addition to losing her honor because of her affair, is later scorned by her dying son. Doña Bernarda lives to witness her son imitate the lifestyle of his

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<sup>44</sup>Excessive drinking can also be considered characteristic of naturalism, for liquor makes man lose his rationality. Zola's novel L'Assommoir (1878) deals specifically with the degenerative effects of alcoholism.

father, whose behavior she had despised. Neleta loses her lover and her child, both dying violent deaths. Thus all three widows dominate those who come under their influence, and ultimately they are responsible for the downfall of others.

Such strong influence by women in nineteenth-century Spain is uncommon. Likewise the positions of importance that many of Blasco's female characters hold are unusual, particularly doña Bernarda as political activist and Neleta as proprietor of a tavern. There are, however, more universal traits which allow us to empathize with the female protagonists, in spite of differences in their social, economic, and historical backgrounds. Doña Manuela's pseudo-sophistication, doña Bernarda's authoritativeness, and Neleta's ambition are shortcomings found in many people. This universal appeal of Blasco's characters contributes to the fact that his Valencian novels are read and appreciated even today.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters of our thesis, we have studied seven of Blasco's primary female characters,<sup>1</sup> using as a frame of reference their importance in their respective Valencian novels. However there are common elements in the characterizations of all of the seven women that allow them to be analyzed as individual characters apart from their novels. In this chapter we will comment, in particular, about the similarities of their physical descriptions, their characterizations, and their relationships to the major themes in the novels. Moreover we will show a correlation between Blasco's fictional characters and actual Spanish women of the nineteenth century.

In order to highlight some of the common qualities shared by all of these feminine characters, we will refer to passages in Blasco's work, Los enemigos de la mujer (1919), which relate directly to women in general. This novel,

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<sup>1</sup>These seven women are Dolores, Rosario, Tía Tona and Tía Picores (Flor de Mayo); doña Manuela (Arroz y tartana); doña Bernarda (Entre naranjos); and Neleta (Canas y barro).

classified as one of Blasco's cosmopolitan novels,<sup>2</sup> deals primarily with a group of aristocrats living in Monte Carlo during World War I. The plot revolves around their various plans for spending their leisure time and maintaining their extravagant lifestyle amidst the ravages of the war. One plan is to live secluded from women--they refer to themselves as "Los enemigos de la mujer." The leader of this group, a Russian prince named Lubimoff, believes that without women the men's lives will be happier, less complex and more productive. But despite Lubimoff's and his friends' initial determination, each of them in the end either marries or has an affair with a woman, who ultimately dominates him.

Throughout the novel Lubimoff offers us his views about women and it should be noted that these opinions may indeed represent Blasco's own personal feelings. It is not surprising then to discover that Lubimoff, like Blasco, is wealthy, has numerous love affairs, and travels around the world in his expensive yacht. Also both men are known for their courageous efforts in various national and international wars and for their valiant feats in several

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<sup>2</sup>According to Emiliano Diez-Echarri and José María Roca Franquesa, Blasco's cosmopolitan novels are Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis (1916), Mare Nostrum (1918), and Los enemigos de la mujer (1919).

Emiliano Diez-Echarri and José María Roca Franquesa, Historia de la literatura española e hispanoamericana (Madrid: Aguilar, 1968), p. 1116.

personal confrontations. We can surmise then that Lubimoff's comments, which are Blasco's comments, afford us an insight into the author's attitudes toward his female characters. For example, despite Lubimoff's warning that "la gran sabiduría del hombre es no necesitar a la mujer,"<sup>3</sup> the male characters in Los enemigos de la mujer as well as those in Flor de Mayo, Arroz y tartana, Entre naranjos, and Cañas y barro ultimately succumb to female domination. Man's dependence on woman, especially apparent in the significant part she plays in directing his life, is an underlying theme in many of Blasco's novels.

Another constant in Blasco's works is his emphasis on the physical descriptions of his characters. We have discovered that the lengthier and more detailed the physical descriptions, the greater the possibility that the character will be a dominant figure in the narrative. Catherine Reding even contends that the physical descriptions of Blasco's characters frequently offer a clue to their inner personalities: "Often he [Blasco] presents features which are significant because they are indicative of the inner man as well as of his external appearance."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Vicente Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. II (2nd edition; Madrid: Aguilar, 1949), p. 1218.

<sup>4</sup>Catherine Reding, "Blasco Ibañez and Zola," Hispania VI (Nov. 1923), p. 366.

Repeatedly, Blasco stresses the expressive quality of his characters' eyes, especially his women characters. This fascination with feminine eyes is not unusual, for the importance of the Spanish woman's eyes has long been a tradition: " . . . while the eyes of the men are for the most part languid, only occasionally flashing forth, those of the women are rarely quiet for a moment; they sparkle, they languish, they flame--a whole gamut of expression in one moment of time . . . "<sup>5</sup> Blasco captures this distinctive aspect of feminine eyes in his descriptions of his female protagonists, thereby enhancing their physical appearance, and, at the same time, affording us an insight into their personalities.

For example, the author demonstrates doña Manuela's beauty by referring to her eyes as "ardientes ascuas" (Obras completas, p. 278). In contrast he later describes them as "ojazos lagrimeantes y tiernos," and comments that " . . . [Manuela] parecía la Virgen que tiene el corazón erizado de espadas" (p. 330). Doña Manuela assumes this sorrowful countenance whenever she wants her son Juanito to sympathize with, and, consequently, help her with her financial problems.

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<sup>5</sup>L. Higgins, Spanish Life in Town and Country (Detroit: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), p. 54.

By studying Rosario's and Dolores' eyes, we can observe the mutual animosity that exists between these two women. Upon encountering one another at the fish market Dolores' beautiful green eyes become "moteados de oro por la ira, . . . " (p. 399), while Rosario's eyes seem "brillantes de fiebre" (p. 401).

Likewise Leonora's eyes are significant, as evidenced in the numerous, often poetic, descriptions of her eyes in the novel Entre naranjos. For the most part these descriptions accent her attractiveness. For instance, the passage in which Rafael sees her coming out onto her aunt's balcony is typical. "Apareció en el balcón una amplia bata de color celeste. Lo único que vio Rafael fueron los ojos, el relámpago verde que pareció llenar de luz todo el hueco del balcón" (p. 568).

Blasco also uses passages similar to the above in his depiction of Neleta's beauty. In the following excerpt from Cañas y barro, he emphasizes the almost mysterious quality of Neleta's eyes: "Ella abría sus ojos verdes, en cuyo fondo se reflejaba la luna como una gota de rocío, . . . " (p. 842). But we also find a less poetic view of Neleta as she contemplates the birth of her child. Descriptions such as, "sus ojos iracundos" (p. 900), and "sus ojos verdes, que parecían extraviados por la angustia del dolor and el peligro de la situación" (p. 903), underline both her anger and her pain.

Although Blasco describes at length the eyes of all of his female protagonists, he takes great care in depicting those who have green eyes. These feminine characters possess a distinct charm. In general Spanish authors have traditionally considered green eyes as a sign of beauty.<sup>6</sup> In La Celestina green eyes are "one of the chief marks of supreme beauty," and in Cervantes' masterpiece don Quijote imagines that Dulcinea possesses "green emeralds" for eyes.<sup>7</sup> Blasco continues this custom of paying special attention to those feminine characters with green eyes. In fact, among the female characters whom we have discussed in our thesis, the three with green eyes, Dolores, Neleta and Leonora, are principal female protagonists as well as the most beautiful and most provocative of all of the women characters in the Valencian novels.<sup>8</sup>

Even though the author emphasizes the physical beauty of Dolores, Neleta and Leonora, for the most part Blasco, like Zola, regards beauty as a vice rather than as a virtue. The French critic J. Ernest-Charles explains

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<sup>6</sup>Grove A. Day and Edgar C. Knowlton, Jr., V. Blasco Ibañez (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 44.

<sup>7</sup>Havelock Ellis, The Soul of Spain (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1908), pp. 75-76.

<sup>8</sup>Also in Blasco's personal life we know that he was attracted to women who had green eyes, such as his three lovers, Carmen, Cora, and Elena.

Pilar Tortosa, Tres mujeres en la vida y la obra de Vicente Blasco Ibañez (Valencia: Prometeo, 1972), pp. 53, 155, 169.

Zola's concept of beauty: "La beauté est un vice. La beauté est un crime. Toutes les femmes belles répandent la douleur et la mort autour d'elles."<sup>9</sup> Likewise in Blasco's Valencian novels the attractive women characters are frequently responsible for ruining the lives of the other characters, especially their male counterparts.

We can contrast Blasco's characterization of his beautiful heroines as vicious evildoers with his depiction of his poor female characters as honest, untiring laborers (who incidentally are usually homely individuals). We even feel that the author displays a particular preference for these lowly women and J. Ernest-Charles agrees with our viewpoint: "Blasco Ibáñez a l'espoir que les pauvres gens seront sauvés; et on sent qu'il aime ces pauvres gens."<sup>10</sup> Despite his apparent predilection for his poor characters, such as Rosario, Tía Tona, and Tía Picores, Blasco does not portray them as idealized or as perfect. Instead he depicts them as pitiable individuals and hopes that the reader will be able to understand and to forgive their occasional malevolence.

The fact that Blasco's beautiful women characters are usually portrayed as troublemakers, while his poor characters are seen as downtrodden victims of society, leads

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<sup>9</sup>J. Ernest-Charles, "Blasco Ibáñez," Revue Bleue, January-June (1905), p. 665.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 666.

us to believe that the female characters that we have discussed in our thesis are essentially flat. According to E.M. Forster in his work Aspects of the Novel,<sup>11</sup> flat characters are constructed around a single idea or quality, making them one-dimensional and predictable, often verging on caricatures. Examples of such exaggerated characterizations can be seen in Blasco's depiction of Rosario as the very submissive wife, Tía Picores as the extremely crude fisherwoman and doña Bernarda as the stern, uncompromising mother. Additionally, flat characters most of the time behave in a consistent manner; hence there is little development in their personalities. And yet it is this same consistency and predictability that results in a certain familiarity between the reader and the character, a situation which enables the reader to remember these characters long after finishing the narrative. For example, we shall always remember Neleta as the inhumane mother and Dolores as the ambitious opportunist. And it is difficult to forget the meekness of Rosario and the perseverance and courage of Tía Tona. Equally impressive are Tía Picores' coarseness, doña Bernarda's inflexibility and doña Manuela's pretentiousness. These convincing and forceful characters are easily analyzed because their characterizations remain basically unchanged throughout the narratives.

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<sup>11</sup>E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (London: Edward Arnold and Company, 1927), pp. 93-106.



Another important aspect of the female characters is their relationship to the major themes in the Valencian novels, specifically the themes of love, death and greed.

Love is one of the principal motifs in Blasco's novels since the amorous relationships of the protagonists and the consequences of these relationships provide the basis for a major portion of his works. Unlike Zola, who usually treats love as animalistic, Blasco considers love as a voluptuous experience.<sup>12</sup> With respect to the woman in particular, Blasco suggests that she is motivated not only by the sensual attraction of an affair, but also by the sense of conquest that she feels in her love-making. This same idea is expressed in Los enemigos de la mujer when Lubimoff comments that the woman more often than not dominates and controls her lover:

¡Las mujeres! Esas penetran en nuestra existencia, acaban por dominarnos, quieren que nuestra vida se moldee en la suya. Su amor por nosotros no es en el fondo más que una vanidad igual a la del conquistador que ama la tierra que ha hecho suya con violencia.<sup>13</sup>

Lubimoff also contends that a woman takes pride in her lover only when he provokes jealousy and envy in other women:

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<sup>12</sup>Reding, op. cit., p. 367.

<sup>13</sup>Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. II, p. 1226.

"La mayoría de las mujeres necesitan el orgullo en el amor, que el amado infunda admiración y envidia por su valentía, por su hermosura, su riqueza o su talento."<sup>14</sup> These two factors, the woman's dominance over the man and her contentment with having an enviable lover, are evident in the relationships discussed in our thesis. For instance, Dolores is the dominant partner in both her marriage to El Retor and her affair with Tonet. Besides, she is pleased that her romances are of interest to the other fisherwomen and that her lover provokes their envy.

Other factors, though, usually complicate the women's amorous relationships, mainly the problem of deceit or infidelity. All of the male/female relationships in the Valencian novels are affected in some way by one or more deceitful partners. The motives for faithlessness are varied, but one of the chief causes stems from the faulty criteria used by the female in choosing a husband. Most of the women characters that we have studied choose their partners for superficial reasons, such as his wealth or prestige. Consequently either the man or the woman becomes disenchanted and, in most cases, has an affair. For example, Dolores deceives her husband by having an affair with Tonet just as Neleta is unfaithful to her husband by taking Tonet as her lover.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 1344.

On the other hand, the women are at times the deceived partner, as evidenced in the relationship between Tía Tona and her young lover Martínez as well as in the marriage of doña Bernarda and her promiscuous husband. None of the amorous relationships are without problems and they usually end in unhappiness, despair, and sometimes even in death.

In fact death is another one of the recurring themes in all of the Valencian novels with the exception of Entre naranjos. And, the female, in particular, is closely linked to death, an association which is well-defined in the novel Los enemigos de la mujer. Here Lubimoff explains the woman's relationship to death: "El amor y la mujer me hacen pensar en la miseria de nuestra existencia, en el inevitable final, en la muerte."<sup>15</sup> And he later admits: "No puedo estar al lado de una mujer sin encontrarme con la imagen de la muerte . . . Nos horroriza la imagen de la muerte, y toda mujer la lleva dentro, obligándonos a adorarla."<sup>16</sup> The male characters who marry or who have an affair do indeed suffer the consequences, often even death.<sup>17</sup> It is interesting that in Flor de Mayo, Arroz y tartana, and Cañas y barro the two male

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 1279.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 1279.

<sup>17</sup>Rafael in Entre naranjos is the only primary male character in the four Valencian novels studied who does not die because of his relationship with the female protagonist.

protagonists in each novel as well as their eldest sons die,<sup>18</sup> while none of the major female characters in these novels die.<sup>19</sup> Surprisingly, the deaths of the male characters, (usually described with crude, often grotesque details), do not alter significantly the attitudes and ambitions of their female counterparts. In essence, death appears to be man's punishment for succumbing to woman's control.

Although it is a secondary theme when compared to death and love, the element of greed is indeed significant, and is of particular interest when we realize that it is a major motivating factor for certain feminine characters in the Valencian novels. We have seen that the women's cupidity even effects their choice of a lover, and Lubimoff of Los enemigos de la mujer affirms this fact when he contends that "la moneda brilla en el fondo de todo amor."<sup>20</sup> This situation proves to be accurate with respect to the Valencian novels, for three of the seven women studied in our thesis

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<sup>18</sup>Specifically, these characters are El Retor, Tonet and Pascualet (Flor de Mayo); Melchor, Rafael and Juanito (Arroz y tartana); and Canamel, Tonet, and Tonet's infant son (Canas y barro).

<sup>19</sup>Also noteworthy is the fact that all of the major women characters in Flor de Mayo, Arroz y tartana, and Canas y barro and doña Bernarda in Entre narnajos are widows either at the beginning or at the end of the narratives.

<sup>20</sup>Blasco Ibáñez, Obras completas, Vol. II, p. 1226.

marry solely for money.<sup>21</sup> Yet after they are married they are not satisfied with their husband's money or his social standing and become almost obsessed with the idea that they must acquire even more wealth and a higher social standing. These determined women, in particular, Dolores, doña Manuela, Neleta and doña Bernarda, concern themselves solely with their own personal ambitions. The consequences of their selfish behavior are often devastating, especially to their family and friends.

However before we totally condemn Blasco's women characters, we must first consider their economic and social backgrounds. A great majority of the female characters that we have discussed are depicted as part of the poor, underprivileged sector of society, and, as such, they have experienced numerous personal hardships. In many cases these women, especially Dolores, Tía Tona, Tía Picores and Neleta, must be callous and strong-willed in order to achieve any measure of success. Most of them will do almost anything to better their situation, for instance, they will marry a wealthy husband or manipulate their family and friends. Some even turn to violent, ruthless behavior, such as Neleta's abandonment of her newborn infant. Because of their self-centered, avaricious nature, they are insensitive and at

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<sup>21</sup>Specifically, these women and their husbands are Dolores and El Retor, doña Manuela and Melchor, and Neleta and Cañamel.

times even cruel to those who surround them.

Their obsession with the idea that they must possess wealth, prestige and material riches was not, however, atypical of the times. Both men and women of nineteenth-century Spain more often than not judged a person's worth by such superficial standards as his money or his social standing. In this respect the female characters in the Valencian novels reflect the sorry state of Spanish society at the turn of the century.

The effects of pragmatism and materialism on nineteenth-century Spain created a new kind of society, one based on financial success rather than on family heritage. In Los enemigos de la mujer Blasco discusses this situation: "El lujo, sea como sea; el lujo democratizado, al alcance de todos, conseguido por el dinero, . . . no tiene sabor, ni olor, ni marca de origen."<sup>22</sup> He comments later that women in particular were attracted to extravagant spending. "Jamás en ninguna época había sentido la hembra más afición al lujo ni menos escrúpulos para conseguirlos."<sup>23</sup> We have shown throughout our study that Blasco presents numerous examples of this type of flighty, yet callous female who places money above all else.

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<sup>22</sup>Blasco Ibañez, Obras completas, Vol. II, p. 1255.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 1255.

The author also depicts another type of feminine character, one who is aware of her lowly position in society and is determined to rise above it. Here again his characters reflect actual situations in nineteenth-century Spain. The traditional place of the Spanish woman as always subordinate to man was beginning to change, although slowly. With this change came the emergence of a small number of aggressive, independent women who felt that they should no longer be confined to the roles of wife and mother. We have demonstrated in our thesis that Blasco's female characters usually regard their customary feminine roles as secondary to their own personal ambitions.

We have also shown that those feminine characters who, through their own efforts, realize some measure of economic success constitute a minority. Most of them, like most women of nineteenth-century Spain, were not able to accomplish anything of significance outside of the home because of society's long-established prejudices, injustices and inequities towards the female in general. Such inequities included a lack of adequate education, and a near absence of business opportunities for women. Even when a woman was able to find a job, she had to take into consideration that society still scorned the working woman. Thus we can conclude that the difficulties encountered by the Spanish

women at the turn of the century are many of the same difficulties faced by Blasco's feminine characters.

In the works that we have discussed, we tend to associate the women's attempts to improve their status with their overall characterization and we do not see them as ardent feminists or as the author's means of expressing his views on the inequalities between men and women in nineteenth-century Spain. It is indeed true that in the Valencian novels Blasco's principal concern is the portrayal of certain groups of individuals in specific Valencian environments. Nevertheless in his later thesis novels,<sup>24</sup> the author's social commentary becomes a significant, if not the most significant, element in the narratives.

Yet in his later works, as in his Valencian novels, the female protagonists are outstanding, both as dominant figures in their relationships with other characters and as representatives of their particular historical era. This observation strengthens the basic premise of our thesis, that many of Blasco's feminine characters in the Valencian novels are indeed primary.

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<sup>24</sup>Diez-Echarri, op. cit., p. 1116. According to Diez-Echarri, Blasco's thesis novels are La catedral (1903), El intruso (1904), La horda (1905), and La bodega (1905).



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## VITA

Carol Levert Langston was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on March 7, 1947, the only child of Harold and Rita Levert. She graduated from Sacred Heart of Jesus High School in New Orleans, and later attended the University of New Orleans, receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree in Secondary Education in 1969.

Continuing her education she entered the graduate school at Florida State University and received her Master of Arts degree in Spanish in December, 1970. After returning to her native Louisiana, she began her doctorate studies at Louisiana State University. In Baton Rouge she met Terry D. Langston, whom she married in 1973. Their only son Gavin was born in 1976.

Presently, she is teaching Spanish at Metairie Park Country Day School while completing her requirements for her Doctor of Philosophy degree which she plans to receive from Louisiana State University in December, 1979.

## EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Carol Levert Langston

Major Field: Spanish

Title of Thesis: Female Primary Characters in Several of Blasco's  
Valencian Novels

Approved:


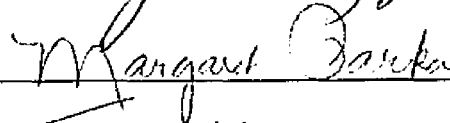
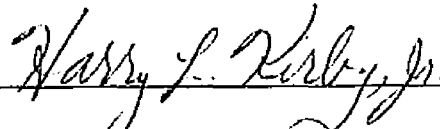


Major Professor and Chairman



Dean of the Graduate School

### EXAMINING COMMITTEE:



Date of Examination:

November 5, 1979